A Study of Sri Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita

THOUGHTS ON THE GITA

M. P. PANDIT

Includes
GEMS FROM ESSAYS ON THE GITA

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1. The Gita

Before we begin our study of Sri Aurobindo's approach to the Gita it is perhaps necessary to make a few preliminary observations about the importance and the special role that the Gita has played in the spiritual, religious and the social traditions of the Indian people.

As far as we are concerned, the Gita has played a significant part in the lives of both Mother and Sri Aurobindo. As you all know, the Gita was Sri Aurobindo's companion in Alipore Jail and even before. He had an intimate communion with the Lord of the Gita which he describes in his Uttarapara speech, and he specifically mentions that he followed the yoga of the Gita when he was in Alipore Jail. His fondness for the Gita continued even after he came here and his perspective and vision broadened and heightened. It had become a part of his being as it were. I found that the largest number of references in his writings to scriptures is from the Gita. Next comes the Upanishads and then the Veda. He had always looked forward to translating the Gita into English verse. It was one of his regrets that he never found time to do that. When somebody presented passages from the *Essays* as his translations, he disclaimed that they are not translations but paraphrased explanations. Still, Anilbaran's edition compiled from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* is by far the best of the editions giving the translations in the spirit of Sri Aurobindo's approach.

The Mother recollects how when she had come to a certain blank in her sadhana, an Indian, Gyan Chakravarty, placed an old copy of an imperfect French translation of the Gita in her hands and asked her to regard Lord Krishna of the Gita as the in-dwelling Godhead. And she says her work was done in record time.

Mahatma Gandhi always swore by Gita. Tilak wrote his *Gita Rahasya*, the Secret of the Gita, when he was in Mandalay Jail for about six and a half years. Acharya Vinoba has written and a number of others have also dwelt on the Gita. In fact, next to the Bible, the Gita is the most translated text in the world. Somebody has made a list of more than 300 translations in different languages.

The Gita is one of the scriptures which can be treated as a guide to spiritual life. It can be treated as the guru. We have known people who have literally followed the instructions in the Gita and have arrived. Mother speaks somewhere that you can treat *Savitri* as the guru. There are some such texts and Gita is one of the most pre-eminent of them. The Gita consists of 700 verses. This number 700 seems to have some occult significance because another important scripture, *Devi Mahatmya* or *Chandi Saptashati* has also 700 verses extolling the glory of the Divine Mother. Not one of these verses is redundant. Those who have read Sanskrit scriptures know very well that there are repetitions, exaggerations, poetical excesses in them but not so in the Gita. It is a compact work.

A question is asked by critics: do you really mean to say that Krishna spoke and Arjuna heard these 700 verses on the battlefield when the trumpets were blown and both the hosts were ready to fight? It is ridiculous. It is something foisted there, it could not have happened. Actually,

the dialogue has taken place on the battlefield. The Gita loses its background shorn of the occasion, the battlefield, the crisis. What must have happened is that the message had been given in a cryptic form suited to the occasion but later someone open to the inspiration of Krishna has put them in this form. It forms an integral part of the Mahabharata.

As you know, what is regarded as the Mahabharata today was not the original epic. In his studies of Vyasa, Sri Aurobindo refers to the tradition that originally there were 8000 verses and that work was entitled *Jaya* — Victory. Gradually it underwent expansion and the verses became 24,000 verses. It was called *Bharata*, the story of the land of Bharata. Later, over the centuries, various persons went on adding material, stories, legends, sub-stories, dialogues from different points of view and the work got swollen to 100,000 verses covering the wide sweep of life, so much so that it is said that what is not there cannot be anywhere else, and rightly so.

But at the moment we are concerned with the Gita. Modern scholars have been speculating about what must have been the original Gita and what could be the interpolated portions. Some scholars have reduced the number of verses to about 300. But that is not acceptable. Competent judges have found that from the first verse to the last it is one compact piece of inspiration not admitting any reduction. So let us approach the Gita as a scriptural text with a significant background, spoken under a high spiritual inspiration.

Analysing its background, Sri Aurobindo underlines its synthetic nature. There is a gap of at least 2000 years between the Vedas and the Gita. Much deterioration in the

purity of the Vedic message had taken place. There were warring schools, debates on the claims of rival philosophies, dialectics. The Gita in its large sweep takes up the essentials of all the approaches, all the philosophies, and weaves them into a working harmony. It does not wed itself to any one single philosophical system. It speaks of the Self — Atman, which is one everywhere, which is the basis of unity but on that account it cannot be called monism because in the next breath it speaks of the Lord and the human soul having a relationship, a relationship of dependence, of devotion between the Lord and the soul. This is qualified monism but it is not that alone. It speaks of Purusha and Prakriti but the treatment it gives is quite different from the one that is given in the Sankhya. It speaks of Jnana, Knowledge, but it does not confine itself to the path of Knowledge alone. It speaks of devotion, Bhakti, but does not limit itself to Bhakti. It speaks of action, Karma, but it does not say that it is the only path. It takes a comprehensive view of the developing process in the world, the complex nature of the human being and offers alternatives, a synthesised approach where all these different traits of nature are brought together. It is a remarkable product of synthesis.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of three large attempts at such synthesis in the development of the Indian consciousness. The first is recorded in the Rig Veda where men and gods, God and creation, heaven and earth, are all brought together in a natural living unity. The next wave of synthesis is in the Upanishads, maybe a thousand years after the Vedas. The Upanishads start with the spiritual experience of the Vedas and test and justify it from varied angles of the intellectual approach of the mind in a language suited

to the mentality of a later age. The next is what we have been talking about, the approach of the Gita, the third mighty attempt at synthesis of the diverse trends of Indian experience. He refers incidentally to still another attempt, the effort of the Tantras in which a brave attempt has been made to justify Nature, life on earth, in terms of God, an effort made to use the very handicaps and obstacles to spiritualisation as aids to achieve the aim. These are the four broad attempts at synthesis.

But the Indian genius for synthesis, for reconciliation, for manifestation has not ended there. If we are observant enough we see that Sri Aurobindo himself is the architect of the latest attempt of synthesis — synthesis of the different potentials in the human being, synthesis between the individual claims and the collective demands, synthesis between matter and spirit; also, what we may call a quaternary synthesis in the human personality, four powers, four streams of consciousness coming together to build a life of perfection. No seer has taken such a total view of the evolving universe and harmonised the claims not only of the diverse interests on earth but of the different planes, the seven planes of existence. He speaks of the harmony between the individual status, the universal status and the transcendental status of the Reality in man. Man is important because it is in his consciousness that all the three can fuse and meet. That is Sri Aurobindo's contribution.

And further, apart from its contribution towards synthesising the thought and experience of man, the Gita takes particular care to revive many concepts, principles, institutions which had lost their true significance and come to be condemned as reactionary. It speaks of the principle of sacrifice, gives a totally different meaning and makes it

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2. The Divine Teacher

Sri Aurobindo takes up a few points for clarification on the spirit in which we have to approach the Gita. In the first chapter, *The Divine Teacher*, he brings out certain features of the speciality of the person who gives the teaching. The Gita is not a work embodying the wisdom or the substance of the life and message of a spiritual person or persons, like the Bible or the Buddhist scriptures. It is neither a work embodying the inner quest like the Upanishads. It forms a class by itself and it carries a note of urgency in an unusual situation. It is a message that is self-sufficient but here we will be missing a good deal of the importance of the Gita if we were to overlook the circumstances in which it came to be uttered. From this point of view it is important that we study it as part of the epic, the Mahabharata. Whether it formed an integral part of the epic or was inserted later, is not very important. The point is it has been so in-woven into the structure of the epic that you cannot study it apart from that background. And in all the 18 chapters, the situation that calls for this message is brought back to our attention again and again.

It is not a spiritual message or a religious message but something practical that applies to daily life. This practical application gains its full value when we study it in the light of the crisis and keep in mind the significance of Kurukshetra. This is not an ordinary occurrence, — Arjuna's laying down the weapon and falling a victim to depression. It

is not a situation which can be met by the normal prevailing standards of thought and action. It is something very special and it has an eternal relevance because the crisis which articulates itself in the situation in which Arjuna finds himself occurs sometime or other, in some way or other, in the life of every individual. Wherever there is a field of action, *kurukshetra*, wherever you observe certain standards, *dharmakshetra*, the situation is perennial, one of confusion of mind, necessitating the appeal to the Higher Light.

Now there are three significant things which we have to keep in mind. First is the divine personality of the teacher. He is not an ordinary teacher, a learned man or one who has done tapasya, acquired knowledge and is competent to teach. He is a divine personality. The second is his characteristic relation with the disciple. It is not the usual relation of a *guru* and *shishya*. And third is the occasion of the teaching. Coming to the divine personality of the teacher, there are many intricate concepts. We have observed when we studied the subject, that an Avatar descends in human form at certain critical junctures in the process of evolution of the earth-consciousness. It is a special manifestation. There is besides the eternal Avatar. The eternal Avatar is God or something of God that inheres in man. In this sense everyone of us embodies something of God, call it the Self, the Soul, whatever. This formation of a divine essence in the form of a soul is the eternal Avatar. And this Avatar is not merely individual. In each of us there is God in the core of the heart, seated in the cave of the heart, the master of the being. But He is also spread out in the cosmos, the Universal Godhead. The same Divine who stations himself in the universe as

the Universal Godhead has also a station above, the Transcendent Godhead. These three poises are eternal facts of our existence.

In the parable of Avatars, the Puranic account, we have seen how the periodical Avatar comes to make a transition from grade to grade of consciousness in the earth-being. Lord Krishna in the Gita speaks more as the Eternal Being. He describes himself *hridisthitena* — situated in the heart. "Men despise me in the human body *mānushim tanum āshritam*; he who does the asuric tapasya hurts me" etc. In all these utterances he speaks as the immanent Godhead, the eternal Avatar who is of perennial moment to man. It is not as a periodical Avatar that he speaks though that also is there particularly when he says, "*bahūni me janmāni* — many are the lives that you and I have had, I know them, you do not." That aspect is there. In these matters you cannot have water-tight compartments. The point is that the teacher is God, the Immanent God, standing in human form speaking to the world. The disciple Arjuna is not just a prince who is out to win a kingdom but he is the representative man of his age. He combines in himself all the bravery, the nobility, the chivalry, the humanity, that the best of men can embody. He is the typical representative of the highest evolution of humanity of his age, fit enough to receive the message, to inspire the Godhead to commune on equal terms to begin with.

We said that this Avatar is a revelation of the Godhead in humanity. How is that possible? Some theologists and Christians will not admit it but the Indian system, particularly the Vedantic view, takes it as a logical conclusion because it holds that all Existence is a manifestation of God. There is nothing that is not God. Therefore He is the only

Existence. Normally God manifests in the form of eminent qualities, characteristic powers, striking capacities. But occasionally He manifests the whole Consciousness. He is the Avatar worshipped by humanity all along.

If God manifests on earth in human form, what is the relation between man and God? The Vaishnava conception speaks of a permanent relation of God in man and man in God: *nara-nārāyana, nara* is the man and *nārāyana* is God. They are eternal companions. The Nara-Narayana concept is historically associated with a school of philosophy, very old, in which *nara*, the human soul, is regarded as the eternal companion of God and it is only when Nara opens to the influence of Narayana and begins to live in God that he has unity with Narayana. So the Divine Soul present in humanity is, Narayana.

The inner divinity in each person, to repeat what we have said, is the eternal Avatar in man, Krishna in the Gita stands for both; he is the special Avatar who has come down to push the line of evolution upward to the overmental level. He also represents God in humanity. From this point of view the external aspect or the historical aspect is of secondary importance. Whether Jesus lived as the historical personality or he is a later concoction, whether Krishna was a historical character or not is not very important. What is important is the consciousness that is given the name of Christ, of Krishna, the inner Christ, the inner Krishna. The case of Krishna is different because we have plenty of historical testimony to the existence of a Teacher called Krishna. In the Chhandogya Upanishad, for instance, there is a cryptic reference to how Rishi Ghora communicated a *vidyā*, a science to Krishna, son of Devaki. Obviously the son of Devaki was famous. He did not need

any further reference to make his identity clear. And that he is the same Krishna who figures in the Mahabharata is made clear by reference in the same Upanishad to Dhritarashtra, leaving no doubt that Krishna of the Gita is also the Krishna of the Mahabharata.

The relation between Arjuna and Krishna is something that extends beyond one life. We spoke of Nara-Narayana, God in man and man in God. It is a constant feature of manifestation, the human and the Divine. Sri Aurobindo draws pointed attention to the reference of God Indra and Rishi Kutsa driving in the same car. He draws attention also to the famous figure of two birds on the same tree, one higher and one lower. This figure of Nara-Narayana has played a considerable part in the religious development of Indian consciousness.

So, Krishna and Arjuna have a unique relation. In view of his continuous relationship Arjuna is fit to receive the message of Lord Krishna. In the symbolic relationship between Indra and Kutsa, the relationship between the two birds, the emphasis is on knowledge, dawn of knowledge. But here in the Gita it is an action that liberates. Sri Aurobindo points out that the Nara-Narayana here are not the Rishis that are meditating in the Himalayas but the protagonists of a mighty action at a crucial point in the struggle between the right and the wrong, between truth and falsehood. So all told, the personality of the teacher, the competence of the disciple, the unique nature of the occasion and the aim of applying the high wisdom to practical action, — all these make the Gita a unique document of constant relevance to man. It is not an old scripture that we worship and read for our edification. It is a dynamic Power that can guide, that can enlighten, that can change

the quality of our life because ultimately our life is the field of action, Kurukshetra. It is there that we have to establish Dharma. We have to act according to Dharma, the highest Law of our being.

And what is that Law? How are we to know the true law amidst the clash of so many laws that claim our allegiance? These are questions that we will discuss later. But at the moment let us keep in mind that it is the inner Godhead that Lord Krishna represents in the Gita and not so much the periodical Avatar. It is the eternal Krishna lodged in the heart of every person, every creature, governing, guiding in the affairs of men. In this sense the teacher is there in each one of us awaiting our turn to His call. The Puranic conception of the flute, the call of Krishna and the response of the gopis is a symbolic imagery of the Divine call to the human soul to turn its steps heavenward, Godward.

Thus the Gita is not just a message that was delivered on a particular occasion with a historical importance but something eternally relevant to the aspiring man; whether the man is leading a spiritual life or preparing for a spiritual life, the message, the call is here.

Now that we have dwelt upon the divine personality of the teacher, we will next turn to the human disciple, human because he is a representative of humanity. He carries all the imperfections and limitations, hesitations, reservations of man, who is not fully awake, who is in the midst of the battle of life.

3. The Human Disciple

We spoke of the Divine Teacher and noted that the teacher who speaks in the Bhagavad Gita is not so much the historical character that was known as Krishna, as the eternal Avatar, the Divine Consciousness that has descended in humanity and acts from behind the veil in the individual as the Lord seated in the heart, and also the Self behind all phenomena in the universe, as also the Presence overseeing and presiding over the diverse movements that constitute the universal activity. He is the Divine World Teacher to whom all action is offered by those who are enlightened and to whom all action reaches whether it is consciously offered or not. He is the Teacher who is sought breaking open the veil by the individual, to establish a link with him, commune with him and adore as the Master of his being. That is the Divine Teacher whose presence presses upon us from all sides however ignorant we are of that Presence. But slowly, inevitably, we do open by pressure of circumstances, by compulsion of events, by the very force of evolution to awake to this Master and surrender ourselves to His Will at some point of time.

With this background we proceed to the human disciple Arjuna who is clearly the representative man of the age. Arjuna is not to be treated as a Pandava prince who has suddenly developed cowardice and who requires lot of persuasion to fight. Maybe that is the outer appearance but he is a representative of humanity in the sense that

even today, 3000 years perhaps after the historical event, he still represents the best in humanity, engaged in the field of action, thirsting for knowledge, ready to receive the knowledge — the knowledge of the right course of action. That is Arjuna.

In the life of each one of us there is a moment when the Arjuna comes forward. In this sense he represents a particular state of consciousness, evolving consciousness which is matured by the best culture, the highest law of the times but who in a moment of crisis is perplexed as to the right course of action, who has begun to wonder whether the law that he has been following is the right law. Now such an occasion arises in the life of many, and Arjuna represents that mood, that state and that is why he is treated as the representative human. If Krishna the Divine Teacher is the eternal Avatar, Arjuna is the constant human mind which is ready to receive knowledge from the highest source in order to arrive at a fixed certainty of the law of action.

There is, incidentally, a tendency among scholars to treat the whole of the Gita as an allegory, as something symbolic concealing some other order of teaching. Sri Aurobindo draws pointed attention to this approach and explains why the Gita cannot be treated as an allegory. There are scriptures like the Vedas and some of the Puranas which are clearly symbolic. They speak in terms of legends and stories, human incidents, but there is always something looming over the physical sense. And that is why there is more than one meaning in the Vedic texts, also in some of the legends of the Puranas. The language itself is such that it is not to be taken literally but as symbolic. The Gita is not cast in that mould. The language of the Gita,

the terms that are used, the context in which things are taking place, all of them are actual. They appeal to the intellect of man in a very urgent manner. There is no need to twist the language of the Gita to arrive at what we may imagine as the wisdom of the Gita. The Gita is plain, its text is unambiguous and even when it uses certain terms in a different sense than the common, it explains, makes us understand that the right meaning has been obscured, and the true meaning is this, as for instance in the Gita's treatment of renunciation, of sacrifice — Yajna. All told, the Gita is not symbolic but it is typical, typical in the sense that it pictures a type of situation which occurs in the life of man again and again. It stands as a type which reflects similar movements down the ages.

The Gita is no doubt a vivid portrayal of the growing companionship between the human aspirant and the Divine Master. The Divine is not something far away beyond an unbridgeable gulf from the adoring human. Sri Aurobindo describes how in the Veda there is the famous illustration of the companionship of Rishi Kutsa — Kutsa Angirasa, and Indra, the Lord of Knowledge, Lord of the Divine Mind. Kutsa means one who seeks knowledge. Kutsa prays to Lord Indra who is the Lord of the Realm of Light and Knowledge and Power derived from Knowledge. He prays for his grace. Indra responds, fights with the enemies, — the inner enemies of the journey, of the progress of Kutsa Godward. He eliminates the enemy. And both Kutsa and Indra are described as driving in a common chariot heavenwards towards the Divine Kingdom. Indra is the charioteer, Kutsa is the companion.

And who is Kutsa? Significantly Kutsa is described as the son of Arjuna or Arjuni — Arjuna means the white

one, the purified one. And his mother is Switra — the white one. On both sides he is the child of purified consciousness. Well, in companionship with Indra he travels and by the time he arrives at the home of Indra, he has grown so much in likeness to Indra that it is very difficult to distinguish who is Indra and who is Kutsa. It is given only to Shachi, wife of Indra, who is Truth-Consciousness, — possessed of truth in her consciousness — to identify that this is Kutsa and this is Indra. This story, significant at every step, is a parable of the divine companionship between the human and the Divine, leading across the struggles against the enemies towards the Kingdom of God.

The legend bears a close resemblance to Arjuna seated in the chariot and Lord Krishna being the Charioteer. The one difference between the Vedic legend and the Gita situation is this: Kutsa was an aspirant for knowledge. He was a man who worked to receive the light of knowledge. But not Arjuna. Arjuna was essentially a man of action. He wanted to know the right course of action. Knowledge had use for him only to the extent it made possible the right action. He was not a philosopher, not a seer, but a dynamic man of action.

Now this man of action, Arjuna, asks Krishna, his charioteer, to drive in the midst of the two contending hosts in order to see for himself who are all the hosts whom he is called upon to fight and kill. He knows in a general way that these are the people who have championed unrighteousness, espoused injustice, falsehood. But still he wants to have a vivid, direct, first-hand picture of the people whom he is to slay. And when he realises that among those who are ranged against him are not only his relatives by blood but revered teachers, masters from whom he has received

so much of knowledge, whom he has revered and great perceptors to whom he is indebted, there is a recoil. For the first time he realises what he has got into, and he does not know what to do. All his attention is on the level of action, not in the angle of knowledge-perception. This pragmatic man finds all standards failing him: the standard of a Kshatriya, the standard of a brave man, the standard of a prince, the standard of a champion of righteousness, all these conflict. Ultimately he is called upon to do something against which his moral sense revolts.

Now, what is he to honour: the moral sense or his duties as a Kshatriya, his responsibility to the world of truth and righteousness? He does not know. It is the first time he is confronted and confounded by this challenge. He himself has been a person of great sattvic attainments, brave no doubt, courageous no doubt, valiant, but still governed by a Dharma. Dharma, as you know, is Law; dharma is not a code of conduct written in Shastras but it is derived from the root *dhri* — to hold, uphold, that which holds together. That which upholds, that is Dharma. There are various shades of Dharma but this is the essential meaning. And Arjuna has always guided himself according to the demands of Dharma. But now he is confused. He awakens to the full implications of the action he is called upon to do, first through sensation. This sense-impact, the impact of what he sees, the spectacle of these elderly masters, leaders whom he is called upon to kill unnerves him. His nerves fail, there is a sensational impact. That is the first stage.

He remembers he has gathered here for, what he calls, the 'holiday of fight', *ranasamudyame*, and this is what he has come to; he has come with perfect zeal, enthusiasm, valour but his sensational response is one of failure. He

has disgust for action and because action is bound-up with life, he is disgusted with life itself. Second his emotions are stirred, what am I doing? These to whom I owe everything I am to kill and for what purpose? To enjoy a blood-stained kingdom? Not for me! His emotional upset is terrific. And there is the moral sense. He who is born, trained to protect, protect humanity has to kill, to slay and that too his own brethren! It is unjust, it is immoral. So the sense of morality also unnerves him, confuses him. Mark that in all these movements, triple movement — the sensational recoil, the emotional outburst and the moral repugnance — there is no inward turn. He does not feel that the outer life has no meaning, that the true value is inside. His eye does not turn inward. On the other hand his eye is on external action, external life. What do I do? These are the problems, this is the challenge. He is a pragmatic man, action-oriented and at no stage does he talk like a philosopher. He wants the right course of action. He asks the teacher, what Dharma is he to follow? The teacher listens to all that he says with patience and begins to speak of the principles of higher life, how the soul never dies, it is the bodies that die, the soul is immortal, the Self is immutable, nobody can kill it and what a person who has realised the Self is. And he goes on talking to him of the ingredients of higher life. This confuses Arjuna still more. He feels: I am asking for a practical mode of action and he is speaking of the higher life that has no relevance to me. So he reminds his teacher: you are speaking of the soul-action, but I want a law of outer action.

Again the teacher continues his line of argument and comes to a stage when he says you have to do your action from your status in the soul, from your status in the Self,

the Divine. Arjuna asks how to recognise the Divine. How to be sure that it is the Divine in person? He is asked to renounce action, renounce and still perform. How to do that, how to square actionlessness with action? Krishna speaks of Prakriti. Prakriti ultimately follows the will of the Purusha. But it is Prakriti that has landed him in the situation! He is given a clear-cut knowledge of the distinction between the Purusha and the Prakriti, the field of action and the knower, the various Gunaṣ that constitute Prakriti and so on. All the constituents of practical knowledge are given, all his doubts are set at rest by the revelation of the Universal form of God and he is given the highest Dharma, the highest law, which is to surrender to the Divine Will, to erect the law of surrender to the Divine Will above all the human Dharmas.

4. Interpretations

There are some inspired works, particularly in the spiritual and religious realm, which lend themselves to more than one interpretation. That is because they are not products of intellection, not constructed by the logical intelligence. They come from a level which is above the mind and the meanings they carry are liable to be grasped in different ways according to the level of understanding of the reader. In the Veda, for instance, there are many hymns which can be understood in three or four different senses. So too in the Upanishads there are texts which are not exhausted by their literal meaning. Even in the Bible, there are passages which to the surface mind may look to be banal, sensuous, but to a deeper reading they reveal a profound meaning. Even today in the modern age there are passages, poems from poets like Walt Whitman which look very uncouth in their expression and have been condemned as such by critics but later on there have been other perceptions and people are beginning to discover that what the poet is speaking of is really a deep spiritual experience. What was thought to be an encounter with a black woman is now beginning to be understood as his experience of the awakening of the Kundalini. That way inspired texts have grades of meaning.

Now the Gita which we are studying has lent itself in a similar manner to a number of interpretations and when you read the interpretations they look so natural, so justifiable.

There are many one-sided interpretations of its thought. Some emphasise the importance of action, Karma, and that central idea is made to work itself out throughout the text; inconvenient texts are bypassed and attempts are made to justify one idea. Similarly, the various aspects of spiritual life that the Gita deals with are interpreted with different emphasis; a sectionalisation of the message of the Gita is not integralisation. That is the bane of most of the interpretations, commentaries. We should admit that the line of argument in the Gita is not direct, it is winding, leaving a subject now, leaping to another subject, coming back and so on. It is a headache to logical interpreters.

All of us are aware how the Gita has been understood and propagated as a text which advocates renunciation of life and works. Particularly the Vedantists have stressed that the Gita asks us to realise the futility of works, the endless thraldom to Nature, Prakriti, recognise the limitations of activity and renounce our attachment to life. Do the minimum of works which are inevitable in life and seek your salvation elsewhere. That is the gist of the interpretation of the Vedantic school, particularly the Advaita. But they miss the meaning of *sannyāsa*. Sannyasa, whatever it may have meant in popular understanding, is explained by the Gita very clearly, unambiguously; *sannyāsa* is not renunciation of life, not abdication of responsibilities in life, not renouncing the world but renunciation of desire. It is desire that forges an attachment, that involves you in a personal manner and forges karma. If you eliminate the desire-motivation and do works in a different spirit, the whole meaning changes. Interpreters also fail to note that the Gita is very clear in its preference of action to inaction. Only it insists that with the renunciation of desire arises,

or should arise, an attitude of equality where success or failure is immaterial. What you are concerned with is the performance of the action which you surrender to the Master of your being, to the Supreme Purusha. These are some of the aspects of the Gita's teachings that are overlooked deliberately or otherwise by exponents of the renunciation of life and works as the central message of the Gita.

There are others who will have us believe that the text emphasises devotion, devotion to the Lord, dwelling in the Lord, relationship with the Master. Neither activity nor knowledge is as important as devotion, Bhakti. So they say: this is a text of Bhakti, you are missing the central message in concentrating on other incidental aspects. These protagonists ignore the monistic element. In monism you have only one reality, one principle, Brahman, for instance. You merge in it; the culmination of the life-movement according to them is to merge in Brahman. You do not have relationships; Bhakti means relationship; I as the adorer and He as the adored; worshipper and the worshipped. But in monism there is neither the worshipper nor the worshipped. There is One. And when you merge, there is no yourself left, you are one with the Divine, with Brahman.

The Gita also speaks of the quietistic mergence in the Self. It speaks of the Self, the Atman which is immutable, unchanging, never identified with activity and movement; whether it is the Self of the individual or the Self of the universe or the transcendent Self of all, it is always the same, eternal. As a result of this discipline of quietism, withdrawal from everything, the individual lapses and merges in that Self. There are passages drawing attention to this

side of spiritual life and those who speak only of devotion ignore these passages. Actually, knowledge, devotion, works, all culminate in the Supreme Being. In what manner, in what proportion, with what emphasis, is left to each individual. After all, the path of each individual is cut out before the person takes to the path. It is not our mind that decides, and even if we allow the mind to decide we discover at a certain stage that we have made the wrong choice. But if we allow ourselves to be led by the Higher Intelligence, it is the natural path, whether it is Karma, Bhakti or Jnana.

This compartmentalisation of the three is itself a handicap to a spiritual seeker who wants to arrive at the integral truth of the Reality because, in truth, all the three feed each other. Sri Aurobindo points out how works done in the right spirit of surrender, build up devotion. When you work for the Master you do not labour in a calculating manner; something erupts, a joy of consecration, a joy of surrender and it is that spirit of devotion that moistens the action or the activity in which you are engaged with a kind of elixir of joy. Devotion rises naturally in the performance of works done in the right spirit. And both these, devotion and works, combined culminate in Knowledge, realisation of the nature of him to whom you offer your works.

Similarly, if you are more developed on your emotional side there is a natural inclination in you to pour out your energies in devotional movements. At a certain stage this devotion, if it is genuine, insists on expressing itself in service — service to God and service to those who serve God. So, action develops naturally and the culmination is that you realise the truth of the Being of the Lord to whom you sacrifice, whom you adore. Thus, there is no dry

separation between the three lines of spiritual advance. The Gita openly advocates the *trimārga*, all the three paths joining each other, a confluence of the three paths and the impulses. Those who speak that Karmayoga is the message of the Gita forget that action, unless it is motivated by devotion, becomes a dry movement. It is only when it is moistened with devotion that it culminates in knowledge. The Gita does speak of actions culminating in knowledge but they can do so only when there is the element of devotion. There is a demand for conscious surrender, not just a passive surrender which is tamasic surrender. You may say that all is done by the Divine and allow yourself to be swept into action. But that is not what the Gita expects. It expects a conscious surrender, a participative surrender. Surrender is not done the moment you say you surrender. Surrender is a discipline that has to be worked out from moment to moment. It is a long process. Surrender itself is a sadhana. It is not merely an element of sadhana, but to a large extent it is the whole of sadhana, specially in the earlier stages.

The action that the Gita celebrates is something different from our notions of action. When politicians speak of Karmayoga of the Gita, they have in mind social service, patriotic service, humanitarian service. All those actions are totally different from actions oriented towards God, which is the central burden of the Gita. The Gita speaks of divine action, not human action. All these leaders of thought who connect the Gita with nationalist movements, patriotic urges, forget that the action that the Gita proposes, advocates, is a divine action and not a human action, not social action; the climax of the Gita comes when it calls for a total abandonment of all standards of duty, —

social, ethical, religious, — before the single demand of the soul.

Next, action in our modern world is severely personal, individual, but the action that is called for in the Gita is impersonal. Once you eliminate the motivation of desire and you work because it has to be done, the personal element is lost, personal involvement is not there. You open to an impersonal force and action is turned into a sacrifice. Action changes its character.

All these misunderstandings do not arise if we recognise that the Gita is not a book of ethics, even practical ethics, but a book of spiritual life. The modern mind is utilitarian. It tests everything by pragmatic standards. How far is it practical, how far is it going to be useful to me or to my people or to my country? At most, how far is it going to help humanitarian purposes? The Gita, however, speaks of spiritual standards, spiritual welfare, spiritual consciousness. Sri Aurobindo points out that a person who realises the Brahmic consciousness, the consciousness of God, can do all these things, — social, humanitarian, universal. They are not abandoned, they are not left behind. It is the speciality of the Gita that without desisting from activity, without abandoning life, it shows a way to realise the consciousness that alone can give meaning to both life and activity.

Sri Aurobindo remarks that the modern mind has exiled from its motive-force God and God-state. God represents the Eternal Truth and God-state represents spirituality. Both of these, God and God-state, are master conceptions of the Gita. But to the modern mind they are alien, subjective formations which have little to do with actual life. To sum up this part of the argument, the modern mind lives

in humanity, the Gita lives in God. That is the main distinction.

It is also a mistake to interpret the Gita from today's standpoint. The Gita must have come into existence say about 3000 years ago. The social conditions which gave rise to the situation of the Gita, to the crisis that brought forth the dialogue between the Divine Master and the human disciple, are quite different from what we have around us today. And to judge or to seek to understand the essential features of the Gita from our standpoint, from our setting, is not right. The Gita starts with a clash between varying conceptions of duty. There was the social sense of duty, family sense of duty, class sense of duty, religious sense of duty. But the Gita always stands upon the soul standard, the inner standard; it does not advocate response to the demands of social duty.

Sri Aurobindo makes a humorous observation that certainly Buddha would not be called upon by the Gita to go back to his Sakya kingdom to administer his state, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa would not be asked to go back to his village and teach little children in the grammar school or Vivekananda to go back and look to his family responsibilities. Their call was different; that was respected whatever the social and other duties.

So the social duty is not the most important in the Gita. The Gita does not teach disinterested performance of action. We are told by many interpreters that we should not take personal interest in work; work should be done in a disinterested manner; that means you miss the *rasa* of work. Work, which should be a channel of communication between yourself and your Maker, a ladder for the ascent of your consciousness from the human to the divine, is

turned into a dry means to eke out one's livelihood. They totally miss this point when they say that the Gita advocates disinterested performance of action. The Gita calls upon us to take a superior interest, instead of a selfish, narrow utilitarian interest in work, — a truly spiritual interest. You have to perceive the real purpose of works and perform acts in a different spirit which is not desire motivated, ego-centred, — not disinterested. You take interest in it but with a different motivation, that of self-consecration.

5. Towards Trimarga

Speaking of the Gita, Sri Aurobindo draws pointed attention to the fact that the Gita's counsel of equality is intended for those who are already on the path of the spiritual quest and have advanced enough. It is not for people who are yet to arrive at that point where the spiritual aspiration starts. For an average person governed by ordinary impulses to speak of equality is something impractical. He has to pass through the mill of success, disappointment, frustration, pain and pleasure before he is mature enough to qualify to cultivate an attitude of equality.

Similarly, indifference to good and evil is not meant for ordinary persons; they have to distinguish, welcome the good, reject the evil and be very vigilant in their attitudes to what we call good and what we condemn as evil. If from an average person we ask for indifference, that will be a travesty of truth because in his consciousness good and evil are very real factors which evoke contradictory vibrations. It is only when a minimum of equality is established and stabilised that you can expect a person to have an attitude of indifference. If a good thing happens or an evil, he will not be moved. He will take it as either the Will of God or a natural happening of circumstances. So in both the cases of equality and attitude of indifference to good and evil, one has to have matured enough to practise these disciplines.

The next point is regarding duty. Sri Aurobindo describes it elsewhere as self-interest masquerading as a com-

pulsive duty, but here in the *Essays on the Gita* he points out that duty rests upon social conceptions. There is a society and on every member of the society certain responsibilities are imposed. A father, for instance, will expect a certain obedience, loyalty, affection from his children. The children also expect a certain sense of responsibility and protective security from the parents. These are social conceptions which in the Indian society, for instance, are still living and binding. If you go to the West you will not find this kind of relation between parents and children. By the age of 14 or 15 the children walk out or are expected to walk out of the house, maintain themselves, educate themselves; they do not need to keep any link with the parents. It is not so in our society. That is how social conceptions are different.

Normally these social conceptions override religious or moral laws. For instance, in the case of Arjuna the moral law requires that he should not kill, *ahimsā paramo dharmah*. But his social duty, the duty that is imposed on him by virtue of his belonging to a Kshatriya class, demands that he kill the opponents. Now what is he going to do? That is the problem. Such problems arise in the lives of most people who are conscientious. Those who are brutal, immature, for them there are no such problems. But for those who are awakened, enlightened, there is this conflict of duties.

We in our Ashram are very familiar with this conflict, a conflict which originally was experienced at the level of sadhaks who came giving up their families; married, raised children, left them and came. Their relatives would write to Sri Aurobindo asking him if it was fair that the person should have given them up. If he wanted to come to the

Ashram, he should have brought them also. There were many such instances. Actually the truth lies in the right motivation, whether a person who gives up the dependants and comes here is really inspired by an irresistible pull towards God or it is an escapism. There are problems, the wife is difficult, children are not obedient or there are economic tensions, there is disharmony in family and the person persuades himself that it is best that he disappears from the scene. Now, it is for each person to examine himself and find out what was his motivation in coming here. If it is a higher pull, an inner compulsion, there is no argument, he has to follow it. But if it is otherwise, he is only cheating himself.

That era in the history of the Ashram is over but now it is reflected in the lives of the younger people, children, students who come here. Do they own any duty to their parents who have supported them, who continue to support them financially or is their loyalty exclusively to the Mother as reflected today in the Ashram? This is a question that props up every now and then. And it is facile self-delusion for the youngsters to say that their duty and loyalty is to the Ashram, to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and not to their parents. In taking this stand, are they sincere, are they ready to give up their crutches — the economic resources of the parents? If they are, if their commitment to the spiritual ideal is true and whole, then they would not care whether they are supported from elsewhere or not. They would face the future without calculation.

This enigma comes very often, it has led to quite bad feelings, frustration for the parents but there is no escape. Sri Aurobindo says that these social conceptions of duty

inherited by social traditions are not compulsive; they are not obligatory if the inner view is changed. If the inner relation is changed, then the religious or the other social laws cannot bind.

While on the subject we have to note that there are two laws of conduct. One is dependent upon external status, that is, to which class you belong, which social category, what is your position, what status do you hold in the society? That status imposes a certain duty. But there is another law which is independent of status and that is a product of thought and conscience. One may be a servant, a driver, but if in his conscience, thought, he has a different equation with God or with his own superior, then the external law cannot apply to him. So it is a very flexible situation. And the Gita's counsel is to move always from the lower to the higher status and from the higher to the highest, which is the Brahmic Consciousness, absolutely free.

Next, in our approach to the Gita we must take it as a whole, not just a few chapters saying that this is the kernel of the Gita, the central message, depending upon our preference. When we do so we will find that everywhere it insists on an inner poise and a growing wideness. The Gita does not allow the individual to rest in a shell, it always calls upon him to widen himself, to look at the universal life but deal with it from an inner poise. Most are used to function from an artificial poise fostered by convictions, by social structures but the moment one awakes and takes up the spiritual destiny, it is incumbent on him to deal from the inner poise, what Mother calls 'step back'; do not always deal from the external surface consciousness, withdraw for a while, for a second, and give your response from that level.

The Gita takes care to speak of *sarvakarmāni*, do *all* actions as offering. It does not confine itself to social obligations, to patriotic obligations but to activities of life as a whole with as large a perspective as possible. There are two or three stages that a seeker has to pass through in life-activity. Nobody can do without action; action is the law of life. And action has meaning. The relevance of action continues all the while. It does not cease the moment you have knowledge. Knowledge throws a different light on action. From the action that comes to your lot, you remove your desire and ego-element and offer it to the Divine, make a sacrifice of it, make it an occasion for the pouring of your energies in service to the Master of your being. This is what is called consecration. That is the first.

As you do that, at some stage you enter into the second phase; you realise that you are not the doer really. It is Prakriti, nature-power, that executes the work. You are only a channel, only an instrument, you are not the doer. The sense of doership drops by itself. And the third stage comes when you lose yourself in the divine consciousness; the consciousness or the awareness of being an instrument or a channel also disappears and you become one with the Power that acts, which is divine at its core. But even that is not the end. You have seen the Prakriti acting and when you watch the Prakriti acting, you become aware of something in you that is aloof from work, aloof from everything, immutable, eternal. That is the Self. You learn to take your position in that Self and watch the Prakriti. But a stage arrives when you glimpse the consciousness of the Purushottama, who is beyond both the Prakriti and the Purusha. The individual Prakriti and the individual Purusha are both transcended and you go beyond the *gunas* —

trigunātita, and offer not only your works but your entire life to him. And that is where the final word comes from the Lord. He says the most secret word: that is *manmanā bhava*, be My-minded, a very difficult proposition. That is, all your mind's activities, thoughts, feelings, — they are the Lord's. There is no separate identity left between you and him. Live in Me, that is what the Lord says, be My-minded, and living in Me, *māmekam sharanam vraja*, — abandon all standards, duties, and surrender to Me.

It has been pointed out with great relevance that this injunction to surrender entirely to God comes at the end of 18 chapters and not at the beginning. One has to pass through the fire, the ordeal, the disciplines, awaken all the parts of the being and begin to live in God instead of in the human nature. Then only it comes naturally to surrender to the Lord. So, it is an end-product of a life-long discipline of sadhana, otherwise it is an empty phrase mouthed by the ignorant.

To recapitulate, there are three great steps. First is renunciation *sannyāsa, sannyāsa* not of responsibilities but of desire. It is the inner *sannyāsa*, renunciation of desire, which brings about a certain equality and on that basis works are offered as sacrifice. The second step is that you realise that you are not the doer of works, you realise your inner and greater reality, which is that of the Self, not involved in works, not involved in external activity, but permitting it, watching it. The third is to realise that beyond the individual Self there is the Supreme Self, the Transcendent. And with that realisation comes the final step of surrender to the transcendent Lord.

The Gita has been taken to mean Karmayoga by political leaders, to mean Jnanayoga by Vedantins and Bhaktiyoga

by Vaishnavas. Actually, when you take the Gita as a whole, it deals first with Karmayoga, next with Jnanayoga, then with Bhaktiyoga. Bhakti and Jnana go together; both Karma and Jnana derive their appeal, their *rasa*, when there is Bhakti. It is thus that the double path of action and inaction, activity and inactivity — *pravritti* and *nivritti* — becomes a triune way, the *trimārga*, with the Gita leading not only to a union with the Divine Being but also oneness with the Supreme Divine Nature — *parāprakriti*, which is the self-power of the Lord. There is a union with both the being and the nature — the becoming. That is the fruition of the teaching of the Gita.

6. Rush of Force of Destruction

Before we enter into the line of argument it is better to have another look at the situation which gives rise to the whole episode of the dialogue on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. It is a situation that arises in the life of everyone at some time or other in every age. Analysed deeply it is really a situation of human life, world existence. How do you reconcile life in the world with life in God? This is the problem that baffles Arjuna, not that he is not brave, not that he wants to shirk but he does not see his way to reconcile the claims of life on earth with the claim of his soul. This is why this chapter, the first chapter of the Gita, is called *vishādayoga*, the yoga of dejection. His mind suffers a cloud, he is unable to see.

When we look at the problem we see that the outer aspect of the situation is an unprecedented carnage, bloodshed, destruction; the inner aspect, when you draw your gaze a little inward, is the Lord as Time — *Kāla* — devouring all. There is an emphasis here on God as a destroyer. God has many attributes; God as friend, God as lover, God as a fighter who puts down evil, God as a creator but also God as a destroyer. It is of Him that the Upanishad speaks "He to whom the sages are as meat and heroes as food for His eating and Death as a spice for His banquet." Lord as a destroyer; for Him the sages, men who have realised, are meat, heroes are His food. And Death itself a terror of whom all are afraid, is an ingredient, a spice for

His banquet. Such a One, the Upanishad asks, how shall we know Him, where He abides? This is the terrible aspect of God which we have to accept and recognise. It is easier to recognise this role when we perceive that destruction is the beginning of construction. You cannot construct anew unless you destroy the old, which has gone into moribund state, become out of date, which is holding up progress either by its immobility or by its hostility and opposition. No aspect of life, in fact, is free from this feature of struggle. There is always a clash of forces, energies, a continuous struggle to prevail, to overcome, struggle to stabilise. This is what we see in the outer aspect of nature. The inner aspect is: what is the struggle for, ultimately where does it lead to? It is the Universal Being fulfilling Himself through the process of creation, the process of destruction. If you see destruction in itself, you get a picture out of focus. But when you look at it as part of a process, a movement up and down, you see the necessary role of destruction.

Sri Aurobindo cites the famous remark of Heraclitus, the Greek thinker, who says, "War is the father of things." Everything comes to be as a result of war, result of battle, clash; war is the king of life; that was his perception. You know each one, each thinker perceives that aspect of existence for which he is ready, perception of one aspect does not invalidate, cancel another's perception of a different kind. That is where the human mind errs. It is very difficult for the logical mind to accept that two opposite truths can prevail at the same time in their conditions.

To come back to the theme, there is this constant clash of forces. In our philosophy we speak of clash of possibilities. A number of possibilities strive to realise themselves

and one possibility succeeds in actualising itself by its victory over similar efforts of the other possibilities. With people like Casey, Nostradamus and others who claim to forsee things, what they see is really this clash of possibilities. They see a number of possibilities trying to realise themselves and at the level at which they see, they mistake possibilities for certainties. Some possibilities realise themselves and we say, ah, he has foretold this, he knew this. But as Sri Aurobindo asks, what about those prophesies which never came true. There is a clash of possibilities. The final round of clash is on earth. In a sense, which possibility is going to actualise itself is foreseen there on the subtle-physical level of existence but not here. On earth, till it actualises itself, nothing can be said definitely.

This clash of forces, this struggle for existence creates three possibilities. Some thinkers see this movement of clash resulting in destruction. Ultimately, they say, all is destroyed, destruction is the end. There are others who say that it is a cycle, it will go on turning round and round coming to the initial point again and again. From the ultimate point of view it may be meaningless, it leads nowhere. But there is also a perception that this clash of forces and struggle is part of a progressive movement. Imperceptibly there is a movement forward, a movement upward. It may look like coming back, but it is a spiral course. There is a progression. These are three different interpretations of the fact of struggle for existence.

Further we say that life survives by devouring another life. Bigger life swallows the smaller life and thereby it grows. This is the law. In Sanskrit it is called *matsya nyāya*, logic of the fish — the bigger fish swallowing the smaller. Even vegetables and fruits also have the life-element and

it is because of this life-element that they nourish the life that feeds upon them. If you see the bodily life, leave aside the vital life, it is a constant wearing out, disintegration, decay and death. Of course, it comes to birth again. There is a continuous struggle and dissolution followed by re-creation. The ancients recognised this law of life, this fact of life. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the most ancient of the Upanishads, the Creator is described as *ashanāyā mrityuh* — hunger that is death. Hunger brings about the death of what is eaten. The whole world-existence is described in the image of the Horse of Sacrifice, *medha ashwa*. There is movement and speed but it is intended for sacrifice. Dawn is the head, the morning. The Horse comes to life, Matter is expressively called *anna*, — food. There is a famous phrase describing Matter, *eater eating is eaten*. We eat food and in the process of eating there is a certain expenditure of energy, there is wear and tear of our organs. In the act of getting nourishment we spend also.

At every level of existence there is death, there is destruction, there is swallowing up of one by another. The German philosopher Nietzche was a great worshipper of power, he did not believe in the tender side of life, love, kindness, but in might, destruction. He speaks of a growth of humanity through different stages. First comes the camel-man, camel-man to signify the beast of burden, what Sri Aurobindo calls the primitive, the physical man. The camel-man is followed by child-man: sentiment, love, tender feelings sprout. At that stage he loses some elements of his beastial heritage. Fronting nature he feels powerless. Then comes the lion-man. He draws up his energies, he learns to face nature, to confront opposition, he lords it over. He is the vital man, the lion-man. Thus

the camel-man, child-man, the lion-man. Only after you become a lion-man can you pass into the state of perfect-man. Perfect man is one who is supreme in asserting himself, aggrandising himself, coming to the top. At every stage there is this struggle to assert oneself, to gain power over others, to aggrandise oneself.

From a spiritual point of view, we have to recognise that Shiva, the benevolent god is also Rudra. Rudra and Shiva are not two different gods. In the Indian pantheon of the gods, Shiva as destroyer is Rudra. He is also featured in the Veda as a healer. By destroying what is evil, by destroying what is contrarious, unhealthy, he helps you to grow. That is why Rudra is Shiva and Shiva is Rudra. Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo makes a memorable remark that the debt to Rudra must be paid before Vishnu can come on the scene. That is, suffering, destruction are phases that have to be gone through before we win the right to invoke Vishnu the preserver. In other words, war, destruction is a universal principle. Even on the mental level, there is always a war of ideas, a clash of beliefs. The mind is never silent, constantly there is a restless movement. And even on the moral plane of existence there is this clash, one law claiming allegiance as against another.

It is clear that no leap forward is possible without this clash, without the use of force. The moralist will certainly disapprove of this approach and say that you should use the soul-force. Sri Aurobindo asks: well, you desist from using your physical force and rely on soul-force but when is the soul-force going to act, be effective? Till your soul-force is effective, destruction from the other side will go on. Evil will triumph and you wait till your soul-force effectuates itself. In the process, no doubt the individual's

moral being may be helped but not the generality of men. Gandhi's moral stature may grow, Gandhi may benefit in his inner growth on the moral side, he may feel the moral figure strengthened by suffering, by bearing without resisting. But what about the country, what about the generality, they have to pay. Here we are not concerned with the individual progress, individual way of growth but of the society, of the generality.

We have spoken of the principle of destruction, hostility, what about association? Even this principle of association is an extension of the ego. My individual ego expands to embrace the welfare of others who serve my ego. Ego vitiates the principle of association. Sri Aurobindo draws upon history and points out that how when evil has not been resisted, when evil and the forces of darkness have been allowed to win, the ultimate result has not been very positive. The Christian martyrs did not oppose their Roman conquerors with physical force. They suffered but what happened afterwards when Christianity came into its own? It became another oppressor itself. In this world you cannot avoid destruction. We are not ready for the rule of love. The field has to be cleared before love can reign. Indian religion worships Durga and Kali, the Mother of Might and the Mother of Destruction. It recognises they have their role to play. That is because Indian spirituality has its foundation in Truth and it is a comprehensive approach.

Keeping all these factors in mind we have to look at life in its face before we can transcend it. We cannot hope to go beyond life-situation unless we face it squarely. That is how everyone has his Kurukshetra. He has to face the Destroyer of all that is resistant and retrogressive in his

nature. He may not see the wisdom of it at that moment. The Destroyer has a role to play in the life of everyone. That is why Kurukshetra does not just mean that battle-ground where the wars were fought in history but the battlefield of the soul, where right and wrong, good and evil, light and darkness constantly clash to claim the soul. Right from the days of the Veda this has been featured as a constant fact of life. It is only when we have participated in Kurukshetra that we become qualified for Dharmakshetra.

7. Man and the Battle of Life

Life, as you know, is imaged in a number of ways. Life is spoken of as a journey, — 'journey of life', also as a 'dream of life', 'ascent of life', 'stream of life' to use a Buddhist expression. Each imagery arises from a particular philosophy basing an attitude to life. Here Sri Aurobindo speaks of the battle of life, life as a combat. Whether we are aware of it or not, awake to this aspect of life or not, life is a battle because there is a constant clash, struggle at every level of life — physical, vital, mental. As long as the shadow of ignorance is there, there is struggle; it is a clash of forces, of possibilities, each trying for supremacy over others. And in the bargain, our ethical values, our preferences for violence or non-violence do not seem to matter at all. We have to accept, as beings with commonsense, nature and the process of this world which is one of battle at every moment. Some battles are visible, some are not. Even in such a subtle matter like thoughts there is a constant clash. No one thought is allowed to rule. It has to contend with other thoughts and ultimately one thought prevails, that too tentatively. A stronger thought can always swallow it up. So it is with emotions, conflict of emotions, very rarely do we have a smooth sailing.

In the context of our study of the Gita at the moment, we have the Divine Charioteer, the dominating personality. He is indeed Lord of the world, friend of the peoples but also he reveals himself as Time the Destroyer. He has got

both the aspects, the happy and the not-so-happy. Existence itself has this aspect. The world-existence is not just a mechanical action of a material force, which the physical scientists insist it is and which we know is not the whole truth. If it is not merely a mechanical play of forces arising from sheer non-existence, — Nihil, if it is not a reflection of the activities of Prakriti, Nature in the passive soul, if it is not a gigantic dream, then we are obliged to look existence into its face and accept the existence of God everywhere.

It is too old-fashioned to say that God has created all good, all happy things but the evil, the suffering, the negative side is created by an Adversary or by the stupidity of man. These approaches seek to absolve God of all responsibility for evil, for falsehood, for all that detracts from the divine Truth of existence.

Sri Aurobindo says God is there in the good as also in the evil. He is, in a way, responsible for everything, it is a process. It is no use trying to shift the responsibility or the blame from God to another imagined personality like the Ahriman, the Devil etc. God is there in peace as well as in clash. God is everywhere. We have to start with this solid faith that there is a Divine Presence in existence comprehending the entire movement of the Cosmos. We have to accept that this world is a scene of battling forces and its character is one of change, constant mutation, nothing is ever the same. There is an incessant change from moment to moment. The moment dies the instant it is born. And the most terrible of the features is death; where there is life there is death. This also we have to accept.

There have been attempts by man to seek a solution elsewhere, bypassing this scene of struggle and fight and

escape into a Beyond where, he believes, there is uninterrupted peace. But that is not the destiny of man. Man has to admit the discords as well as the highest principle of good, certainly not accept to live with them, but to overcome them, to change them. This aspect of a constant clash of strengths, less strength and more strength is a movement mounting to a crisis on different levels culminating in physical convulsions. War, physical war is the culminating aspect of a clash of forces going on unobserved by the physical eye. The Gita recognises this fact, both at the moral and the physical levels.

We have always to keep in mind the time, the age when the Gita came into being. At that time war was accepted as a necessary part of life. They did not shirk from the sight of violence, from the fact of war. They recognised the contributory role of war. Humanity, even thousands of years after the age of the Gita, is not yet ready to transcend the war situation. Even after two world wars, all that we have done is a kind of accommodation of interests, an association of interests, but not a true conversion of the fact of war into one of peace. If this aspect of struggle and fight and war is inevitable, the Gita is confronted with the question: how do you harmonise this truth, this fact with spiritual existence — because spiritual existence is also a fact, a fact of life? How do you reconcile both these truths?

The Gita addresses itself to the fighter, the man of action with a responsibility to the society in which war is implied, war against all that stands in the way of progress, the well-being of the people. And such a man of action, the fighter, is a Kshatriya. The Kshatriya is a warrior by function. His function is to fight for whatever the cause. But that is not the whole truth of the Kshatriya. He is by

nature a Knight and a King. There is a certain chivalry, a nobility of disposition and a royalty. As a king he will not stoop too low and to dishonourable ways of action. You can always expect a king of the Indian conception to live and act at a high level of conduct; he holds himself responsible for upholding the high values of honesty, courage, integrity, bravery, sacrifice. That is the Kshatriya. The Gita is coloured by this concept, the social system of those times. It is a far cry to the modern mind from the epoch of the Gita. The modern mind does not and will not accept that you can be only a Kshatriya or a learned man or a merchant or a labourer. It does not recognise the separation of functions in the society. It lumps all things together. This mind does not take into consideration individual nature, individual temperament which the ancient thought did. Each one was expected to function, to live according to his individual nature and the temperament determined by that nature. But today you have responsibility as a man of enlightenment, responsibility as a man of strength, as an organiser, harmoniser, as a worker. Whatever your individual inclinations, you have to discharge your responsibilities in all the directions.

The ancient thought treats man not as a social being as the modern mind does but as a spiritual being. For us today man is first a social creature. He occupies a place in this society, he draws from the society. From his childhood he is obliged to contribute to the growth of the society. He lives as long as the society lives. This modern idea of common obligation in all fields has certainly its advantages. It contributes to an all-round development and a greater solidarity in place of artificial shackles and over-specialisation that developed as the older system became moribund.

Occupations came to be determined by heredity, not by temperament. And each one started specialising in his small area. As a cure to those evils, the present stress on all-round development and greater solidarity is certainly welcome but this approach has had certain disastrous consequences in the modern war. When there is a war all are thrown in. In the good old days war concerned a particular class of people trained and meant for that purpose — the Kshatriya class; all the rest carried on their normal vocations. The farmer continued to till his land when the war was going on outside the peripheries of his farm, the merchants carried on their commerce and so on. But today, if there is a war the totality of society is sucked in. You cannot say, I am not a fighter, I am not a Kshatriya, I am a pacifist, I do not believe in war and I should not be bombed. The bomb is no respecter of classes. So, Sri Aurobindo observes that national defence has, as a consequence, turned into national suicide because in war today there are no victors. And the entire society is under the threat of being decimated.

As we observed, the Indian civilisation aimed to minimise the incidence of war and confine the military obligation to a small class of fighters, not just soldiers and fighters but those with ethical ideals. Each Kshatriya warrior was governed by a high ethical ideal. Fighting under the umbrella of such ideals had an enobling effect and not a brutalising effect as war has today. It is because of this high standing of the warrior class that we have the institution of the Kshatriya in India, the Samurai in Japan, but they are species which have almost disappeared from our scene. Now where the Gita speaks of war, it is such a war confined to the warrior class, not the total war of our experience.

Looking from a deeper angle, the Gita recognises that though war is a manifestation of a principle of life, principle of struggle, it contradicts the fact and the possibility of inner calm, or mastery over nature. These are two facets, one of struggle and clash and one inner calm and mastery. Now how do you reconcile these two contradictions? The Gita addresses itself to this question. Is it possible to accept both or does acceptance of one mean rejection of the other? The Gita faces the question squarely.

The Gita has a background of the Sankhya philosophy which speaks of three *gunas*, modes, qualities of life. Man meets the battle of life according to the quality most dominant in his nature. Each one has all the three qualities of *tamas, rajas* and *sattva*, the mode of inertia, the mode of action, activity, and the mode of balance, light. Now all these form part of nature and inasmuch as each one is endowed with nature and not only with soul, he has these three gunas, qualities in himself. These are common, wherever there is world-energy these modes exist and there is a struggle for supremacy among the three gunas. Nobody can escape it. In the course of evolution it has been possible for man to seek an escape either outside the gunas or above them. When you escape and get out of the rule of gunas, it is an entry into Nirvana; when you transcend them it is *trigunātita*, you go beyond the *tri-guna*.

Either you choose an unconditioned peaceful existence as long as you live by getting out of the rule of the gunas or you rise above them and assume a dominant calm and superior existence. In other words, you choose either the line of *sannyasa*, refusal of action or of equality based upon inner renunciation of desire and passion. You continue to act but with an attitude of equality, an equality

which becomes possible because you have renounced the motivation of desire and the drive of passion. Arjuna seeks the former course — *sannyasa*, he wants to reject action. But the Divine Teacher calls for the inner superiority.

We spoke of the three gunas. Arjuna is a typical example of the rajasic man, an individual in whom rajas is dominant but he is a refined rajasic man inasmuch as he is governed by a sattvic idealism. And it is as such that he advances to the battle with joy, a 'holiday of fight,' he calls it — *ranasamudyame*, confident of the righteousness of his cause. That is the sattvic element. But at that moment there is an uprush of tamas, shirking, refusing, inertia. He is overcome by a mood of renunciation. Mark that this impulse to renounce has not come out of any enlightenment of knowledge or a recognition of something superior, but out of unreadiness to accept the situation. He starts talking of ethics and morals but the truth is, it is a tamasic recoil. There is disgust, there is fear.

8. Creed of the Aryan Fighter

We have come up to the stage when Arjuna who is a rajasic man with a sattivic ideal advances to the battle with joy, confident of the righteousness of his cause. He comes with a victorious spirit but suddenly there is an uprush of tamas, he recoils from the battle and speaks of throwing up the sponge, renunciation.

Here Sri Aurobindo analyses the effect of the three gunas, qualities of nature, listed in the Sankhyan philosophy. On such occasions, crucial moments of choice, when the tamasic quality, the quality of inertia, lethargy, comes up, it expresses itself first as fear and then as disgust. If, however, the tamas in the person is guided or pulled up by the rajasic quality, he feels a weariness, a tiredness of all this useless struggle. There is grief over the likely consequences and ultimately a refusal. That is exactly what has happened to Arjuna.

If rajas is active, governed by the sattvic quality, if the kinetic quality is subject to balance, light, then the person strives to arrive at something superior to life. He struggles no doubt, his energy is put out to break the bonds and arrive at something superior. He refuses the present situation, he seeks to arrive at something higher. But where what drives is the quality of sattva, balance, usually there is an intellectual perception of the vanity of life. Suddenly one perceives in the mind that all this is vain. If the person has a little higher quality of consciousness, there is a spiri-

tual perception of the Timeless, the Infinite, the Immutable Peace before which all else strikes as useless. So it depends upon which guna is predominant in the person. That decides the nature of the refusal. The refusal is there but the motivation of the refusal differs from guna to guna. The refusal can come through any one quality.

This being the situation with Arjuna, a tamasic recoil with a veneer of rajas, the Teacher does not accept this ascetic refusal. Neither does he accept the sattvic renunciation. The Teacher wants a continuation of the action with an inner renunciation. This is what Lord Krishna drives at; he draws attention to the soul's superiority to world-nature, its calm, awareness of the Self. He rejects the physical askesis, the physical tapasya, but wants an inner askesis, an inner renunciation, inner *sannyāsa*. Keeping these things in view, he rebukes Arjuna and points out to him that this is not becoming of him. It is not anything noble that actuates his present mood. It is only a self-indulgent pity. He exposes, in all its nakedness, Arjuna's moral cowardice, an unbecoming self-pity and exhorts him to stand up and fight.

Now this is not expected, in the normal course, from a divine Teacher who is supposed to preach peace, non-violence, non-aggression. But what he teaches Arjuna is totally different. He lays his finger on Arjuna's real motivation. It is a deviation from the heroic qualities with which he is born and which he is expected to cherish. On the surface it would appear that Arjuna is overcome by a compassion. Sri Aurobindo analyses the components of compassion. Human compassion has many things mixed with it: self-interest, attachment, cowardice, refusal to face the situations and so on. But a divine compassion is some-

thing self-existent. And it expresses itself in different ways in different instruments. For instance, in the saint this divine compassion expresses itself as love, as charity. In a thinker it expresses itself as helpful wisdom, strength and a certain largeness of vision. In the Aryan fighter the divine compassion would express itself as chivalry, which means that you smite the tyrant but you smite not with hatred but with compassion and love the erring titan, the *asura*. He is on the wrong path. You do not hate him for that. He is following his bent of nature. But you have to strike at him to protect the right, to guard the truth and also, if possible, to change him, to reform him. God does not hate whatever the Puranas and scriptures, man-made scriptures, may say. There is no hatred in God's dealings with his creatures. There is no truth in the beliefs that God consigns people to hell. They are a travesty of truth. Divine Compassion rules out hatred, rules out punishment and if it strikes, if it goads a warrior to fight and strike, it is not with a view to punish but in order to correct him who errs.

Now Arjuna's is not that compassion, it is self-pity. There is a weakness. Sri Aurobindo makes a remark that weakness also has a place in God's scheme of creation. As long as men are not developed enough they need to be weak, otherwise they tend to be cruel, heartless. It is good that they shrink in weakness. But weakness belongs to a lower stage in the development of consciousness. Arjuna, the Teacher points out, has no right really to determine what he should do. There is his nature, there is the dharma of his class, there is the prompting of the Master of his being. His mind is not to decide on the course of action.

Arjuna admits the validity of this argument but still continues to persist in his own line. And the teacher goes

on to affirm his position on two parallel lines. First he draws attention to the highest ideals of the Aryan culture. Each class, each nature has its duties, its responsibilities. One cannot ignore the call of the class to which one belongs, at any rate in that society. Now these are the highest ideals of Aryan culture. The second is opening into the deeper truths of the being. Above is one dimension, within is another. He breaks into a long philosophical discourse pointing out that the body is not the soul. The soul of a person is distinct from the body. And the changing of the body does not involve the career of the soul. So Arjuna is asked to look beyond the apparent facts of life of body and the senses.

An average man reacts on the level of the senses, his physicality, he is blind to the real fact of his being. And what is the real fact of human existence? It is that through long aeons the human being prepares for an eventual immortality. And who is fit for this immortality? Only he who has risen above the material and the sensational touches. As long as you are capable of being touched and influenced by sensational touches, as long as your world is confined to the material dimensions of existence, it is idle to speak of immortality. Immortality does not mean an indefinite continuation of life in the body. Life continues no doubt, but the continuation of the same body is not immortality. It is a prolongation of the body's life.

Similarly, death does not mean negation of immortality, death of the body does not negate the truth of immortality. Immortality is really transcendence of both life and death. Necessarily it is a state of consciousness, a state to which it is immaterial whether you live in this body or another. There is a certain continuity of consciousness which is not

interrupted by the termination of the life of the body in which you dwell at this time. The crux of immortality is here: if there is a gap between this birth and my awareness in the next birth, then it is not immortality. One has to be conscious. That is why Mother and Sri Aurobindo have been emphasising that it is the immortality of consciousness that is meant and not the eternal continuance of the physical body which, Sri Aurobindo observes humorously, must be pretty boring.

Laying all these truths before him, the Teacher points out to Arjuna how un-Aryan is his ignorance in getting disturbed by the situation around him. What is he grieving for? Is he grieving because the people will die? But what is the real fact of death? There is no such thing as closure. He explains that death is an inevitable circumstance in the self-manifestation of the soul. The soul needs to change its body, to change the level of experience from time to time because the physical body does not and cannot always respond to the needs of the soul in its seeking for varied experience. At some stage the soul decides to discard that body and assume another. In the process the life-force does not die, the life-force continues in its universal setting. The soul continues its experience in another body. What is there to grieve about it? So, he demands of Arjuna that he put away this vain sorrow and shrinking. Apart from this philosophical position which Sri Krishna emphasises again and again, he points out to him that he cannot forget his *svadharma*, the law of his being. Not only the law of his class but of his personal being.

Considered in the light of his *svadharma*, non-slaying here will be a sin, not slaying; not to slay those hosts of injustice, unrighteousness, that would be a sin. Arjuna is

asked to remember his Kshatriya dharma which insists on doing away with the evil doer to eliminate the evil. You cannot eliminate evil without eliminating him who lives by evil. This is an important truth. Sri Aurobindo points out elsewhere that in this world as it is constituted at present, a world of clash, a world of combat of forces, force is a must. Absence of force, non-violence may be a law of some other plane of existence but not here, where nature is red in tooth and claw. Force has to be used to clear what stands in the way, to affirm what seeks to manifest. He points out also that as in individual discipline *ahimsā*, non-violence, may be productive but as a collective dharma it cannot. A society cannot be expected to practise non-violence. An individual may; it is only related to his own growth but not as a member of the society.

Ultimately, if Arjuna is not to forsake his dharma, if he is not to grieve, what is he to do? He has to accept victory or defeat with an equal attitude of acceptance. And in establishing this attitude he rises higher than the Kshatriya ideal. In the Kshatriya ideal you have a clearly marked out course of action but above that there is a certain equality which is something beyond the range of the Kshatriya dharma. So he is asked to know the truth of himself. He is charged by the Divine within to protect the right and destroy those who are living by evil, he is destroying their bodies and not their souls. The soul is immortal. He is to fight with an equal spirit, no hatred, no attachment, no preference, no rejection. It is his duty, duty to himself, duty to God; he transcends his duty to the society. He is not asked to follow the dharma of the Kshatriya but to rise above even that, to follow his own *svadharma* and follow the still transcendent dharma which accepts all with an

equal spirit. That is the creed of the Aryan fighter: chivalry, no personal attachment either way but duty done without pity, without sentiment, but with a high equality.

With this we end the discussion of the preliminary portions of the Gita. Next time we are to deal in detail with the Sankhyan philosophy which forms the bedrock of the Yoga in the Gita. Though the Gita Yoga does not accept the Sankhyan position in its entirety, the main elements of the Gita Yoga or for that matter any Indian yoga are drawn from the Sankhyan perceptions of soul and nature, the constituents of nature.

9. Sankhya and Yoga

The Gita is essentially a Vedantic work. Though there is mention of Sankhya, Yoga, the overall setting is Vedantic. It has, indeed, a synthetic character inasmuch as it combines the main features of the Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga. The Yoga that the Gita advocates is something practical related to life, synthesising the various energies of knowledge, devotion and works. It accepts the starting point of the Sankhya. But at a certain stage it negates some of the main principles of the Sankhya and in some ways it goes beyond.

The Sankhya of the Gita is not the classical Sankhya enunciated in the aphorisms of Eshwara Krishna. It is the old traditional Sankhya which speaks of many Purushas, many souls, whereas the Gita does otherwise. The Yoga of the Gita, we have to remember, is not the Yoga that has been systematised by Patanjali. Patanjali's yoga is fixed in its lines, aims at suppressing the mental activities and its union is in samadhi, a samadhi which necessarily rejects life-activity. The Yoga of the Gita is different, it is large, flexible and Rajayoga represents only one element in it. In Patanjali's system, works, activities are tolerated till you arrive at a samadhi state. But in the Gita, works are treated as a means for attaining union with the Divine Consciousness.

The Gita Yoga aims at subjective practice, an inner change. The Patanjala Yoga has its external limbs, internal

limbs and it does not speak of any inner change of consciousness as the Gita does. The Gita is particular in pointing out that Sankhya and Yoga are not really different, they are only different at the starting point and the aim, but the processes, the framework is the same. The Sankhya, it is pointed out in the second chapter, proceeds by intellectual analysis, enumeration — *sankhyā* — of the various principles of existence, the processes by which the creation comes into being, the reverse process by which you withdraw from the movement of creation. It is a way of knowledge. But Yoga proceeds by works, selfless devotion. In the Sankhya there is a trenchant dualism, two main principles which are eternal. There is first the Prakriti — Nature, which is responsible for erecting this cosmic activity and it presents all activities to the silent Witness-Purusha, the Soul. Prakriti has no consciousness of its own, it is just an insentient, principle. And when the activities of the Prakriti are reflected in the Purusha, the Purusha seems to feel that all this is his activity. He comes under a certain delusion and he ascribes all this world-movement to himself. And there is an appearance of consciousness. The Sankhya philosophy does not admit that the Purusha has an inherent consciousness; it is an appearance of consciousness.

Now what is this Prakriti? Prakriti, Nature consists of three *gunas* which are essential modes of energy. We have already discussed the nature of the three gunas. The Sattva, the mode of balance, conserves, maintains the workings of energy; Rajas creates the workings; Tamas dissolves the workings of energy. When these three gunas are in equilibrium, well-tuned to each other, harmonised, there is no creation. Prakriti is silent, Purusha, naturally is also silent.

But if for any reason there is a disturbance, a disequilibrium in the three gunas, there is the creation. And this creation, which is reflected in the Purusha, continues till the Purusha withdraws his consent to witness and the equilibrium is again restored.

The Purusha of the Gita, however, is different from the Purusha of the Sankhyas. The Sankhya Purusha is a witness and in the very process of witnessing he sanctions. If he does not witness, the movement cannot go on. It is only if he observes, watches, that there is an implied sanction and the movement goes on. But in the Gita, the Purusha is not only the witness, not only the sanctioner but also the Lord, the Master. Besides being the *sākshi*, the *anumantā*, he is the *Ishwara* which position the Sankhya does not envisage.

You will ask, accepted that there is the dual cause of the Cosmos — Purusha and Prakriti, but how does the consciousness arise? How arises the conscious will to see or not to see, to witness or not to witness? According to the Sankhya, even these are parts of Nature. They are operations of *buddhi*. What is Buddhi? The Sankhya explains that there are in all 24 principles of existence. The Prakriti puts out and works upon these principles. Of them five are elemental conditions. They are: first ether, then air, then fire, water, earth; they are really subtle principles which later take the form of ether, air, fire, water and earth. They form the foundations; the characteristic property of ether is sound; of air is touch; of fire is form; of water is taste; and of earth is smell.

The objective aspect of existence is formed from these five elements and five sense-relations: of hearing, tactile sensation, sight, taste and smell. If these are the objective

aspect, the visible aspect of creation, existence, the subjective aspect consists of 13 principles. They are *buddhi*, — Buddhi is also called *Mahat* — and this Buddhi is not just mental intelligence. It is understanding and will; both together constitute Buddhi. Next comes *ahankāra*, the ego-principle which ascribes everything to itself. And then *manas*, the mind-principle with its ten activities, sense functions, five of knowledge, five of action: *jnānedriyas* and *karmendriyas*.

Buddhi, being intelligence and will, discriminates, co-ordinates. Ahankara brings in identification with everything. The Sankhyas have it that even this intelligence, even this will, are *jada*, insentient, very much the same conclusion to which modern science arrives. It says even the mind and the workings of the mind are products of material energy, the same as the Sankhyan conclusion. The Sankhyans hold that this reflection of Prakriti's activities in the Purusha causes the light of consciousness to fall on the workings of material energy. The Purusha is deluded in ascribing to himself what properly belongs to the Prakriti. This, in brief, is the position of the Sankhyas.

Now, there are many things that the Sankhya does not explain. Still on the whole, it gives a certain rational explanation of the processes of this creation, the cosmic processes. A question is asked, we can understand dualism, two principles, but why bring in pluralism, that is many souls, many Purushas. It is pointed out that it is a logical necessity. If there was only one soul, one Purusha, then if by my effort I stop being the witness, being the sanctioner, withdraw myself from the activity and be silent, and if there be only one Purusha, every Purusha all over will undergo the same transformation. But that does not happen. What

happens to me remains with me. That explains, says the Sankhya, why there are many Purushas, plurality of souls. Each conscious being has his own experience. That is why what happens to one does not affect the experience of others. If there be only one Purusha, everything would cease. That is the understandable position of the Sankhya.

Now from this Sankhya philosophy the Gita accepts one Prakriti, three gunas, twenty four principles and the passivity of the Purusha. But it goes beyond. The Gita posits one Self. There may be many souls but behind all the souls there is one Self. The Self that supports my soul is the same Self that supports yours. So all over the Cosmos there is one *Atman*, there is one Self. The second difference to which we have drawn attention is that the Purusha in the Gita is also the Lord of Nature, apart from being the Witness and the Sanctioner, He is the Ishwara — Supreme Cause.

The Gita is not content with speaking of the passive Purusha, it also speaks of the active Purusha. The Purusha has a capacity to initiate action which the Sankhyans do not admit. There is a dual state of one conscious soul. The Self can be passive, the Self can be active, what you have to note is that this passivity and the activity of the Self, are not successive states as they are for us, living as we do on the superficies of existence. When we are active, we are not passive. So we say either this or that. But as Sri Aurobindo points out in the *Life Divine*, it is so only as long as you stay on the superficies of life. Within yourself there can be parallel states, simultaneous states. At one level you can be passive, uninterfering, watching; on the surface level you can be active. So both the active Self and the passive Self can be simultaneous states of existence.

And it is this that is portrayed in the famous image of the two birds. At one place they speak of one nature and two birds; one bird enjoys that nature, another one watches. In another, the two birds are sitting on a tree, one on a lower branch eating the fruit of the tree and undergoing all the consequences of pain and pleasure. On a higher branch there is another bird watching, it does not eat the fruit, but it watches and the moment the lower bird turns its gaze and looks at its companion bird above, it sees the greatness of its own Self and all its taste for eating the fruit drops away. It no longer suffers. The two birds are the two statuses of the soul or the Self, active and not active.

The speciality of the Gita is that this is not all. Above and beyond the two Purushas is a still higher Purusha, the transcendent *uttama purusha* of whom the two lower Selves may be treated as aspects. This *Purushottama* concept is a special contribution of the Gita thought. Not only the three statuses of the Purusha but even on the matter of Prakriti the Gita speaks of two Prakritis. The Sankhya speaks only of the lower Prakriti. There is a higher Prakriti, a higher Nature, which is beyond the realm of Ignorance. In the lower Prakriti the individual being appears as the ego, but in the higher Prakriti he reveals himself as the Purusha.

So to realise that the ego is not the truth of our existence we have to go beyond the formation of the lower Prakriti — *aparā prakriti* as it is called, and emerge into the higher Prakriti, the *parā prakriti*. The Gita elsewhere has a very pregnant phrase that it is the higher Prakriti that has become the soul, that has become the *jiva*, not the lower Prakriti as the Sankhyas say: *parā prakritir jivabhutā*. The essential nature of the soul is the higher Prakriti.

In advancing these truths the Gita synthesises the ways of knowledge, devotion and works. Also it brings together the Vedantic position of the Self and the Reality; the Sankhyan position of the Purusha and Prakriti at our level; yoga as a discipline, an inner means to rise out of the lower Prakriti into the higher Prakriti and realise the truth of our being, the Purusha and not the creature-ego which can be dissolved at any moment. This Purusha can be simultaneously passive, active and also go beyond both and assume the status of Purushottama.

This in brief is Sri Aurobindo's analysis of the Sankhya yoga as treated in the Gita.

10. Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta

Sri Aurobindo takes the first six chapters of the Gita in one block and analyses how they aim at a synthesis of the methods, processes of the Sankhya and Yoga but in a Vedantic frame. They are subsidiary to the perspective of Vedanta. He points out that each chapter is significantly termed a Yoga to indicate that each one traces one line of entry and development of yogic experience. Gita is not a book of philosophy, metaphysics, but a practical manual of spirituality as applied to life. He observes how even such an analytical system like the Sankhya is permeated and remoulded in a yogic spirit.

The Sankhyan system, as we have observed, proceeds through knowledge and intelligence, working of the intelligence to separate the Purusha from the Prakriti and renounce the field of action — *sannyāsa*. The philosophy of Yoga proceeds through works, works which are shunned in the Sankhyan philosophy as productions of Prakriti. Here Yoga has a different approach. It proceeds through works, aims at transformation of active consciousness, and an inner renunciation of desire, not an external renunciation. That is the speciality of the yogic approach.

The aim, however, of both Sankhya and Yoga is the same: transcendence of birth, this terrestrial existence, and union with the highest Reality, you may call it by whatever name. When the Teacher puts together both these different approaches, Arjuna is naturally bewildered and finds it

difficult to effect a synthesis in his mind. He says: You are now speaking of Buddhi, of works, and I am totally confused. The Teacher proceeds to reconcile works and the yoga of intelligence.

He utilises the operation of Buddhi to make works acceptable through discrimination; knowing that the works are done by Prakriti — Nature, and with this knowledge ceasing to identify oneself with works, works being done in a different spirit than with desire. So purified, works lead to knowledge. Arjuna is still more perplexed and the Teacher has to point out that real renunciation is not possible without yoga. Merely discarding the externals does not amount to renunciation. It is an inner withdrawal from the action of desire and ego that alone can give the power of renunciation.

Secondly, works are not to be renounced, works are to be elevated into sacrifice. Sacrifice is important. When the Lord created the peoples, he created sacrifice as their companion and told men and gods that with sacrifice as their companion, they should increase. At the same time when he speaks of the different types of sacrifice, the Teacher affirms that the sacrifice of the knowledge is the highest.

Now, all these shafts of knowledge, spiritual experience, increase the perplexity of Arjuna. He says: you speak of desireless works but at the same time of renunciation. You speak of action in inaction, that is, even when a person appears to be inactive, some action goes on. The Teacher tells Arjuna to probe a little deeper; he will find activity going on, maybe at the level of mind, at the level of feeling, at the level of pranic energies — action goes on. The Teacher speaks of inaction in action. Even when one

is engaged in activity it is possible by an inner detachment to be above that action. Action goes on on the surface, it is an output of energy which belongs to Nature, but as a result of detachment, result of equality, one is unmoved. That is inaction in activity. He points out that both renunciation and works effect salvation in their own way but the yoga of works is superior.

It is a central note of the Gita to invest works with a certain excellence. The yoga of works as propounded by the Gita synthesises the best in the Sankhya and the utmost in the Yoga that was current at that time. That is how it forges an integrality which contains both Sankhya and Yoga.

It is difficult to do true renunciation without yoga; and yoga means equality, equality means no stress of desire, no push of ego. That brings about the inner renunciation. This far the Teacher explains in the first six chapters. Naturally the whole of the teaching is not yet; we are yet to come to the stage when he speaks of the Triple Purusha, not just the active Purusha and the passive Purusha but the transcendent Purusha of whom the active and the passive are two aspects. He also develops, later on, the concept of double Prakriti. The Prakriti in which we are all involved is only the lower Prakriti. There is a higher Prakriti, a higher Nature, which is called *parā prakriti*. And then there is the contribution of Bhakti. All the same these six chapters concentrate on reconciliation between Sankhya and Yoga in the overall setting of Vedanta.

By and large in that age the Sankhyan principle of Purusha and Prakriti was accepted in all the philosophical positions, till it was overshadowed by the Buddhist approach. For Buddha there was no Prakriti; he spoke of Cosmic

Energy. Movement of Cosmic Energy creates Karma; what is effected by the Energy is not permanent. This impermanence of life, of the results of Energy, is the keynote of Buddhist philosophy which completely overshadowed the Sankhyan approach. Buddha was followed by Shankara and Shankara replaced the Buddhist Impermanent by Maya. He spoke of Maya, the power of illusion. Buddhist non-being, non-existent, was replaced by the featureless Brahman, ineffable Brahman — *anirvachaniya*.

We will note that in the Gita Maya has a different meaning. It does not have the connotation that Shankara gives to it. Maya is identified with the lower Prakriti and Prakriti consists of three *gunas*. So the Gita is explicit in speaking of *trigunyamayi māyā* — Maya of three gunas, Prakriti of three gunas.

Though these are philosophical positions, in their practical results both Sankhya and Yoga of Works amount to the same. Looking backwards and taking a larger view, Sri Aurobindo points out that in the Vedantic approach, at the moment of liberation Maya ceases for the soul, Maya ceases to act. Once the soul realises its true nature, its identity with Brahman, Maya ceases to operate. Life and action are therefore ruled out. They are there as inevitable stages but once the soul comes to a knowledge of its true identity with Brahman, life is devalued, action is ruled out. But in the Gita Yoga, action has a different role. In Shankara's philosophy they admit that action is inevitable, activity has to be done. It is a necessary evil. So you perform only such actions as are related, in some way, to your quest, — worship, yajna or whatever, — prescribed actions. But once you come out of it, they have no longer any value; so action does not have a permanent significance. In

the Gita, however, the very activity which is used as a purificatory process in the Vedantic Yoga, is converted into a means of liberation. A desireless action done with a spirit of equality processes the being, opens the door to the birth and growth of devotion, Bhakti. And both together, Karma and Bhakti result in Jnana. That is the central feature of the Gita.

Historically Gita's insistence on action could not prevail against, what Sri Aurobindo calls, the tremendous tide of Buddhism. Action was deprecated. The Gita, however, has influenced the Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhism as practised in India and in the countries of the South-East Asia is called the Hinayana, the lesser vehicle. What is practised in Tibet and in areas influenced by Tibet, is the Mahayana, the greater vehicle, where the traces of Gita can be found in the meditative, devotional exercises practised by those votaries and also the stress on compassionate action. As long as you live, though liberated in consciousness, the Mahayana counsels you to do actions out of compassion for those who are less fortunate. Sri Aurobindo also traces the influence of the Gita, *lokasangraha* and devotion.

Works, which in the narrower Vedic interpretations, mean only ritualistic works, acquire a broader significance in yoga where they speak on *sarva karmāni* not only *nitya karmāni. Nitya karmāni* are those enjoined upon man for performance every day. The Gita speaks of *sarva karmāni*, whatever action you do that becomes legitimate, that becomes a means for liberation provided you approach in the right spirit.

Similarly, the Gita censures *yajna*, but Yajna done in the ignorant way, for ignorant ends. In the Gita sacrifice

takes on its true meaning, self-giving, interchange. It underlines the fact that it is a law of life. Nobody can live without participating consciously or unconsciously in the operation of the law of sacrifice. That sacrifice goes ultimately to the Supreme Lord; though ignorant men may offer the sacrifice to the lesser gods, ultimately even the lesser gods are emanations, however distant, of the Supreme Lord.

The Gita fuses the language of Sankhya with the language of the Vedanta. In defining the concept of the Purushottama, the Gita goes beyond both the Veda and the Upanishad. And in affirming that the true source of knowledge is in ME, who is lodged in the heart of every creature, the Gita points out that true knowledge is not in the scriptures, at any rate the whole of it. It is there in the heart of man, in the heart of each being.

Similarly, speaking of Mantra, it is the word that comes from within. The verbal formation is only the most external form. The mantra rises from the heart. The truth that it embodies is greater than the expression that it finds.

This part of the Gita ends with the high note that no scripture is all-sufficient. Scriptures of any religion, sayings of any saint, any prophet, embody certain wisdom, knowledge, but it is not all-sufficient. The call is to go beyond the scripture; Sri Aurobindo says, that is the saving word. Truth is what is heard by the inner ear, what is seen by the inner eye and not what is entombed in a written scripture.

In affirming these truths the Gita strikes a liberating note setting man free to look into himself and listen to the truth rather than confine himself to the verbal expression of truths. It takes up old ancient conceptions of *yajna* for instance, of action, and gives them a new meaning. Karma does not mean only ritualistic karma but karma done in

life; *yajna* does not mean just the ritualistic ceremony done on the altar but a self-giving that is effected in daily life through consecration of energies.

That is how the Gita prepares the ground for an integral harmonisation of the different streams and energies, of dynamism, of emotions and of knowledge. All the three have got to be fused together, each is meant to strengthen the other streams. In this sense the Gita reconciles the different lines of development, religious and spiritual and philosophical that were current in that age. It reconciles their claims and finds their delivering meaning from a higher point of view, in its concept of the higher Prakriti, and the Triple Purusha, the Purushottama.

11. Yoga of the Intelligent Will

We have so far spoken of the Sankhyan approach, an analytical, enumerative approach, which distinguishes between an immobile silent Purusha and an active evolutive Prakriti. Now the Gita shifts to another, the approach of Yoga, the Yoga of the Intelligent Will — Buddhi.

Buddhi, as we commonly understand it, means intelligence, understanding. But in terms of the Gita, Buddhi is both intelligence and will. It is the intelligent will. This type of will teaches to convert works from being means of bondage into means of liberation.

Normally, each activity forges a link in the chain of Karma. That is why all the spiritual philosophies aiming at Moksha deprecate works and if works are inevitable in the journey of life, they say: do such works as have a purifying effect, like rituals, religious activities and so on. But here the Yoga of Intelligent Will — Buddhi, teaches how to continue the activity and works and use them to forge liberation from Nature. This yoga delivers from fear — *svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt* — fear of death, fear of bondage, fear of God, all due to ignorance, misunderstanding, wrong grasping.

This Yoga insists upon the right intelligence and the right will, both of which should be fixed in the One, in the Self, in Ishwara with equal serenity. Whatever happens, good or bad, the tranquillity is not disturbed. Analysing further, Sri Aurobindo points out that there are two types

of intelligence, one is concentrated, homogeneous and fixed on a purpose. You decide what you want to do and marshall all your energies on that single purpose, cultivate a homogeneity in your feelings, thinkings, activities, all of the same nature as would promote the fulfilment of the purpose. The second type is dispersed, many-branching, coursing about. The mind, the intelligence is never fixed in its aim. It goes on moving from object to object, aim to aim, and is always in a dispersed state. Naturally this is not the way of the Yoga of Intelligence. The Gita points out this Yoga is indeed far superior to Works, works with a motive of fruits, where you have always the *phala*, the fruit, in mind and you start work for that purpose; it is a work that binds.

In a general way the Gita accepts the Sankhya order that the Purusha is inactive, not evolutive; the Prakriti though inactive in its original position, moves into activity when it comes into contact with the Purusha. In the Sankhya the Buddhi that we have been speaking of comes from Prakriti, not from the Purusha. It is discrimination, discriminative power with its subordinate form of ego, power of ego. In the order of the Sankhya: first the Prakriti, then the Purusha, then the contribution of the Prakriti in the movement: Buddhi, then *manas* the sense mind, the mind as related to the senses. And these organic senses are ten: five of perception — *jnānendriyas* and five of action — *karmendriyas*. The power of each sense of perception like sound, form, scent etc., forms a substantial basis along with five elements *panchabhutas* which, you may say, are concretisations of the senses; they are reflected in the pure consciousness of the Purusha. And as these activities are reflected in the Purusha, they become

the material of our subjective experience. To repeat, first there is Buddhi, then Manas — Manas which leads to sense perception and desire. When you seek to liberate yourself from Nature, the order is reversed; first comes the objects; higher than the objects are the senses; higher than the senses is the mind; higher than the mind is the Buddhi; and higher than the Buddhi is the conscious Self, the Purusha. And to reach this higher Self is the object of life. So, you have to entirely reverse the movement of Sankhyan Prakriti in order to arrive at the perception and the experience of the Purusha.

If you observe the action of Buddhi — the intelligent Will, you will see that it is either outward and downward or inward and upward. It is the inward and the upward movement of the senses, of the mind that promotes arrival at the Purusha Consciousness. The Gita describes how you first withdraw the senses from their objects, then the senses are withdrawn in the mind, like the tortoise, *kūrma*, drawing its limbs inwards. The mind is deposited in the Buddhi and the Buddhi in the soul, in the Self-knowledge. In this operation, it is not external asceticism, external sannyasa that is called for but an inner withdrawal. What is renounced is not life, not activity of life, but desire.

Even when you withdraw the senses from the objects, there is the *rasa* of things. You may shut yourself from contact with the objects of senses but the mind can, and usually does, dwell upon those things which are kept out. It is called the mental rasa of things. The mind enjoys the rasa subjectively.

Is it possible to stop even the mental rasa, you will ask. Physical rasa can always be kept out by discipline. But if the mind dwells upon it, indulging in it, how are you going

to stop it? The Gita says it is possible when you experience, when you see the Self — *param drishtvā*. Whether you call it Self or God or the Divine, it is the reality poised above the mind, *param*; when you see that, the earthly *rasas* lose their appeal, their sweetness. Indeed, this self-discipline is not easy. With inner interest, the whole operation is psychological and internal. It is when you allow the mind to take interest in things that attachment is formed — *āsakti, sanga*, and this attachment leads to desire, you want that thing. When this desire intensifies, it becomes passion. Nothing else matters, only that. If you are denied fulfilment of that desire and passion, there is resentment, there is anger. This smoke of anger obscures Buddhi; you fall from the memory of the Self. There is destruction of the Buddhi, the intelligent will. So it is a chain of consequences beginning with mental interest in outer objects. Ultimately you shut yourself off from your consciousness or your memory of the Self. The Buddhi alone is not enough. It is a yogic pursuit, yogic discipline. And what is that yogic discipline?

It is in three words: *yukta āsita matparah*. You have to make God the object of your whole being, not just the object of your enlightened mind, not only of the devotion of your heart; the entire being must have one object — to realise God. Once you embrace that object with your whole being, a contact is formed and this soul-contact should be always maintained, dwelling in him, united with him, you should always be. The Gita always lays stress on living in him, *mayi nivasishva* — dwell in me, that is, there is no question of remembering God when you let yourself lose in God. You float in God. You do not need to remember that there is a thing called God even as you do

not need to remember that you exist; it goes without saying. You should be *yukta*, united with the Lord not only during the high moments of your life but always. Whatever activity you are engaged in, there must be some part which is in touch, which is the link. That should form the basis of the life activity. That leads to a serenity of the soul, *ātma prasāda*. Even when moving among sense-objects in the world, — you cannot shut yourself out, — even when you live with them, when you move in them, there is a tranquil serenity, peace of the soul which is undisturbed.

When this becomes permanent, you arrive at a state of *samadhi*. Samadhi is a calm fixity of the Buddhi in the poise of the Self, in self-knowledge. The signs that you have arrived at this state of samadhi are: first, expulsion of desires. You cannot reach the samadhi state as long as you have desire. There is an inner freedom even when you are circumscribed by outer circumstances. Next, whatever happens the mind is equal, whatever the gains, whatever the losses there is this equality. The soul is in perpetual delight. Whether you are in samadhi state or out of it, there is always a kind of inner samadhi. The soul delights in itself, *ātma rati*. You are above attractions and repulsions, likes and dislikes. Even when you are in outward action, you are inward oriented.

Arjuna listens to this discourse and asks what are the signs? How does such a person talk, how does he walk, how does he look, how does he think? All these are questions of an average intelligence. He is told that the signs are not outer, they are inner; he *knows*. We may add that a person who has an identical consciousness, knows. That is why you say that only a yogi can recognise the worth of another yogi. A scientist, a doctor, an engineer, cannot

assess the quality of consciousness of a yogi. It is only a like measure that can assess it. So a person who has reached the samadhi state can easily recognise, can respond to another in samadhi. There are no outward signs.

To sum up, inwardly, equality without the triple action of Prakriti, *rajas, tamas* and *sattva*, and without dualities, good and bad, right and wrong, pain and pleasure; they do not exist for him. All the while, when there is a true samadhi, there is no cessation from world and activity. The speciality of the Gita is that even as it points the way, the direction to the state of samadhi, it insists upon your continuing in the world and doing your activity. Only it warns that you have a right to action but not to its fruits. Also you cannot have attachment to inactivity. In the name of peace, in the name of renunciation, you cannot sit idle, you cannot desist from activity. You have a fixed poise of equality.

When Mother was asked what is the one sign of a person who has realised the Supramental Consciousness, — I have mentioned it before and it is topical here, — without hesitation she said: perfect equality. He is equal, whatever happens, he is not upset or moved either way. And second, certainty of knowledge, whatever knowledge he has he knows it is right. No doubt, no error can vitiate his knowledge. These are the two signs of one who has realised or embodied the Supramental Consciousness.

If the Gita says *samtvam yoga uchyate*, it also says *yogah karmasu kaushalam*. Normally people understand this *kaushalam* as efficiency, how you can produce the maximum results in the minimum time, cleverness. But the yogic sense of *kaushalam* is how you can do works without getting bound by them. The skill of doing work without

forging the bondage of Karma — that is *kaushalam*. In other words something in you is inactive even when the outer being is active.

By practice you arrive at the *brāhmi sthiti*, the status of Brahman. The first result is, there is a reversal of the whole view of things, looking at yourself, looking outside, in-view, out-view, complete reversal. The values, the attitudes, the purpose of a man who has realised this Brahmic state, is something totally incomprehensible to one who is still enslaved to the senses and the operations of ignorance. So it is said that what is day for the Jnanin is night for the average man. And what is night for the average man, because he is always absorbed and involved in day-to-day activities forgetting his own true state, that kind of feverish activity is out of bounds for the Jnanin, it is night. It is a telling contrast and illustrates the attitudes and the states of consciousness and the modes of life of one who knows and one who does not know.

The ultimate in this portion of the Gita is: one reaches the *nirvana* in Brahman but this Nirvana again is not a self-annihilation, you do not disappear, you do not kill yourself, there is no self-destruction, or annihilation; your separate personal self joins, merges as it were, in an infinite Impersonal Consciousness. That is, you break the shell of your personality and you become impersonal. When you become impersonal you do not cease to exist but you respond from an impersonal consciousness. The person continues in the front. Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, are typical examples of this impersonality. To anything you present to them, anything you ask, the answer comes from there; the impersonality articulates itself through the personality. So it is an impersonal personality;

personality as a centre, as a focus, does not cease to exist. The Mother says, a soul which has been emanated from the Supreme cannot disappear. It may unite and be not apparent to the surface but you continue in that immensity, you continue in that impersonality. The individuality may go but the individual remains as a point, a kind of centre of that particular truth which started the career of the soul. You are never abolished. The outer personality may merge in the inner dimension but annhilation is not possible. That was one of her categorical statements drawn upon her experience and not on philosophical speculation.

So far we have touched the first foundation of the practical teaching of the Gita and that is a practical unity of knowledge and works, knowledge of the Self, works of Nature combined. As yet there is only a hint of the third element, the crowning element of love, devotion. That forms the theme of further chapters. Knowledge and works we have analysed; we will be moving on towards the element of love and devotion which adds a new dimension to the meaning of life and emergence in the divine source.

12. Works and Sacrifice

We have come to the stage where the Teacher counsels withdrawal of will from ordinary motives of human activities. Arjuna is told, following the Sankhya philosophy, that he has to exercise a certain restraint of will in the motivation of life-activity as it is normally led. Naturally, Arjuna is bewildered. Is that the right course to withdraw from the compulsions of activity? Why should I be asked to do this terrible slaughter? Why such insistence on this work? He asks the question and the Teacher once again takes up the threads of the argument and points out that by renunciation of works alone one does not attain to the required serenity of poise; by abstaining from activity one does not get peace; one does not get the joy or the happiness of the soul. One is not active, that is all. A distinction is made that activity does not mean only physical movement. We are apt to think that action lies only in externally visible manual action. But one can desist from external activity and still the mind may be engaged furiously, furiously because there are no external pressures. So the mind is free to draw upon all its energies and dwell upon what it desists from externally. This kind of mental activity is, from the point of view of consciousness of the inner growth, more harmful than external activity.

The Sankhyan position is that abandoment of works, rejection of life, are indispensable for liberation. But is such renunciation really possible? Even if we want to

desist from action, can we really do that? The Gita points out that we cannot, because there is always the compulsion of Prakriti, Nature. Certainly one is not more powerful than Nature and willy-nilly one is compelled to act on one plane or another; it could be the physical level, the mental level or the vital level. This fact of the universal action, the cosmic action, the external power and activity of the cosmic energy, has been preceived and concentrated upon in the Tantras. The science of the Tantras lays great stress on the dynamic aspect of life: there is a power, a Shakti which is always acting on a cosmic scale and no individual can hope to be free from its drive. And it is a central feature of the Gita that it recognises this force of activity on the part of cosmic nature. The activism of Gita goes a long way to modify the quietistic tendencies of the old Vedanta, because as we all know, whatever the differentiations and the approaches of the different schools of the Vedanta, the one common feature is rejection of actions, rejection of activity, renunciation of involvement in life and withdrawal into a quietistic state. The Gita points out that that is not practical, not wholly possible. It recognises the truth of activism. It speaks of action, of the journey of life which necessitates activity. And it points out that withdrawal from physical movement does not guarantee that one is free from activity.

We have a mental existence too. For everything that we do physically, there is a cause, there is an interior factor at the subjective level. It is because we sanction, we consent at our mental level that our senses, our faculties exert themselves in external activity. We think that the objects of sense are the cause because they attract us, they repel us. It is pointed out that they are only occasions;

objects themselves are not the cause. Even the consent of the mind, the proclivity of the mind to indulge, to engage itself, is only an instrumental cause. It is really the cosmic nature that is at work. Interestingly, the Gita uses a particularly strong expression in speaking of those who refrain from external activity but indulge, mentally dwell upon those very activities, it calls such a person a *mithyāchari*. Now *mithyāchari* is normally translated as a hypocrite. Sri Aurobindo takes a more profound and a higher view and points out that a person who is not able to refrain from the action of Gunas and continues activity on the mental level, but believes that he is not active is deluded. He is not a hypocrite, he is to be pitied for the delusion of which he is a victim, and not condemned as a hypocrite. A hypocrite is when one is conscious and still poses to be different. The *mithyāchari* of the Gita's description sincerely believes that because he has desisted from external activity, he is a renunciate. He does not have the perception that inwardly he is active. At any rate, he is forced to be active by compulsive nature. So the seeker is advised to have a controlled action of the subjective and the objective organism, not just the objective system.

Speaking of action, activity, how do you do act? Action should be done as part of yoga. Yoga, to put it briefly, is a process of attuning yourself to the Higher Reality; call it the Lord, the Higher Nature, the Divine Mother, whatever. You attune yourself to a higher consciousness with a view to identify yourself at some point of time with that consciousness. That is yoga. Yoga is union and what leads to that union. We accept the position that action is not prohibited, not only not prohibited, it cannot be avoided, it has to form part of our daily life. And so to elevate it,

raise action to the level of yoga, one condition is non-attachment to the objects of sense. Sense objects come and go, we handle them, we live with them, but there is no attachment. There is no preference, and no attachment to the fruits of works. There is no reaching out mentally or physically to the fruits of works. This unattached work is the first seed of an eventual perfection. Perfection of this conception is not achieved in one day or one year. It may take a life-time but you begin with unattached works.

The Gita makes a very unambiguous statement that action is superior to inaction. *Karma jyāyo hi akarmanah* — non-action is lower in the gradation of values than activity. We have already observed that it implies non-attachment to desire. Most of the motivation in the normal day-to-day activity is from desire. Here you detach yourself from desire, but you do the action because it has to be done, not because you want a particular fruit. And cultivation of equality; whether you meet with success or failure, whether it is the path of obstruction or a smooth course, you have an equality of attitude, equality of poise — not elated easily at favourable development nor disappointed and frustrated out of proportion when things go wrong. And that is how the Yoga of the Intelligent Will, the Yoga of Buddhi, is fulfilled by the Yoga of Action. Action gives a complete content to the process of knowledge. In other words, with the subjective practice of the Sankhya, detachment from Prakriti, refusal to be involved in Prakriti, letting the action of Prakriti go on without being involved, taking the position aloof of a witness, one practises action as a part of yoga.

But what kind of action? Spiritual tradition all over the world regards normal action as inimical to spiritual prog-

ress. But the practical and pragmatic view accepts that certain activities cannot be prevented, cannot be dropped as long as you live. The body needs food, you have to work for food; you have to live with people, you work for the family, for the society. You have to study, you have to apply your faculties, otherwise you will be a robot. Now all these actions are inevitable. What is the law, what is the principle which is to guide us? The Vedantic position is that since we are not preferring anything as sadhakas, as seekers, we accept as a lesser evil an external principle of action, what is called *nitya karma*; prescribed duties like sacrifice, *homa*, worship, prescribed rituals, well, they are inevitable and that is known as *nitya karma*. But that is not what the Gita accepts. The Gita speaks of *niyatam karma*, not *nitya* but *niyatam karma. Niyatam* means controlled action; action, even inevitable action, controlled by certain attitudes, adherence to the inner principles, desireless works controlled by a liberated intelligence — Buddhi. And it calls upon the seeker to do works as sacrifice. Any work that falls to you, any assignment that comes to you, you do not do it as a duty, you do not do it under a sense of compulsion, but as an offering, as a sacrifice to God. And in the act of sacrificing, there is a raising of the level of conscious activity. It is called consecration. Consecration is to make sacred. You make your action sacred by dedicating it, by committing it to God. It may have incidental advantages, but it is not for them that you do it. But it has to be done and you do it as a sacrifice. You cannot do this sacrifice as long as there is ego, egoism. It is egoism which is the knot of bondage. And this principle of doing works as sacrifice is a bone of contention between what is called Vedism and Vedantism.

Now Vedists, known as the Mimamsakas, hold that you sacrifice, you do rituals, you repeat Mantras and you pray to the different gods that adorn the Indian pantheon, and you are assured of a paradise; after you leave the body, you are transported to a heaven. You enjoy the fruit of your sacrifice, of your activities, karma — that is the principle of the Vedism, as it has been presented by a certain section of its followers. But the Vedanta says that even that is a kind of slavery; maybe not slavery to external nature but slavery to the powers of the mental and material existence, who are called gods. Even with the gods it is a gilded cage, we are still slaves. Thus there is a confrontation between Vedism and Vedantism.

Now the Gita reconciles the two positions by pointing out that the gods, who are normally worshipped in religions with rituals, are after all, not independent entities but powers of the Supreme Ishwara, the Lord. The Gita expressly declares that what you offer to the gods reaches Him ultimately. The sanction comes from Him. And there is really no difference between Ishwara the Lord and Brahman the Supreme Reality; Brahman the Reality overseeing the manifestation of the cosmos is the Ishwara. So, all actions ultimately reach Him. There is no quarrel with the Vedic position, except that the Gita does not accept Hedonism, the doctrine of pleasure, supreme enjoyment of senses as the ultimate purpose of life.

It points out also that ultimately all works culminate in knowledge. Works are not obstacles, they need not be factors for bondage, means for forging karma but they can be means for liberation. The special contribution of the Gita is this: works, activity of life has been condemned in most of the systems, because action forges karma and karma

binds you. The Gita points out a way that by changing the motivation, by eliminating desire and ego and using the action of functioning as a channel for reaching your energies, your consciousness as a consecrated offering to God, each action acts as a force for liberation.

Mother used to point out and rightly that the English word sacrifice does not really bring out the import or the right significance of the word *yajna* because sacrifice implies somewhere an element of pain, something that you do not want to do but you compel yourself to do; you deny yourself something. This negative element of pain, of self-denial is absent from the Indian conception of *yajna*. Yajna is a joyous offering; the more you offer, the more you give, the more you rejoice. You are conscious of a link between yourself and your destination. So we prefer the word consecration, consecrated works. And it is ultimately the attitude, the poise from where you function that decides.

And the Gita in speaking of the sacrifice extends its meaning beyond what was meant by the Vedic ritualists and uses it in a wider universal sense. There are many concepts, many institutions of the older society which the Gita lifts out of the humdrum level and endows with a wider meaning: *sannyāsa, yajna* and other important concepts to which we will come later. It rescues them from the deformation that had come over them in the cycle of those times, extends their meaning and elevates them to a higher level and makes them applicable even 3000 years after to our age.

13. Significance of Sacrifice

Today's topic is on the significance of Sacrifice. There are in the text two references to the institution of sacrifice; the first one speaks of the Vedic sacrifice as it was popularly practised, offerings made to the gods, to the powers that be, praying for fruits of sacrifice like progeny, wealth while on earth and the joys of Heaven after departure. Mentioning this feature of the sacrifice, the Gita roundly condemns the approach and castigates those who say that this is the highest. In the next reference to *yajna*, the Gita speaks of *yajna* in its highest sense, the psychological and the spiritual meaning. It declares that the Creator, the Divine Creator, created both men and sacrifice and enjoined upon them to nourish each other, to grow by interchange, by sacrifice, and men were called upon to foster the gods by their sacrifice; they were assured that they would increase by the gifts of the gods. And the Gita interweaves the concept of sacrifice with the pattern of life itself, the common life of the seeker, the awakened man. It explicitly states that all these creatures come from food, food comes from rain, rain is caused by sacrifice and sacrifice is born of work, exertion; work itself has its foundation in Brahman. The Brahman is the Immutable Self, unchanging, indescribable. In stating this, the Gita takes up a Vedantic position, unlike the earlier one which was Vedic. Now is there a reconciliation between the two? What is the point in mentioning the two side by side? The Gita goes on to

declare that the secret is not in non-activity but in desireless action. In speaking of this desireless action, the Gita strikes a note of reconciliation between the Vedic and the Vedantic position.

Incidentally the Gita points out that great men like King Janaka reached perfection in life by works, not by abstention from works. Activity is the law of life, to turn action into sacrifice is the way.

There are three kinds of action. First is the normal, selfish, egoistic action without any element of offering or sacrifice either to God or the gods. It is entirely self-centred. That is the lowest type of action. The second one, slightly superior, is that which is normally done even with desire but as a sacrifice in order to gain the results on the fruits of that work. But because of the element of sacrifice it is superior to an entirely selfish egoistic mode of action. And the third type of action, the superior one is the one which is done without desire, as sacrifice. You act without desire, because it has to be done and you do it in a spirit of sacrifice, offering to the gods. In this discussion there are three important words: Yajna, Sacrifice, Karma, Action and Brahman, the Divinity.

Yajna, the Gita explains, does not mean only ceremonial performances of the type the Vedic protagonists describe because it is very clear that ultimately Brahman is the source of work from where sacrifice issues. And this Brahman is both immutable and mutable, *akshara* and *kshara*. The Gita makes a solid contribution to the philosophic thought in clearly declaring that both the mutable and the immutable, the moving and the unmoving, the dynamic and the static, are poises or statuses of the same Brahman. The Vedic philosophers are reluctant to admit

this aspect of activity on the part of Brahman. They say that all activity proceeds from Maya, the power of illusion, a lower power; the Brahman itself is untouched, impersonal, unchanging. But the Tantras point out that the Shakti, which is another name for the dynamic aspect of Brahman, Brahman as power, Brahman as Shakti, is as true and as real as Brahman the static, the witness.

Once the seeker adopts this mode of action for purposes of sacrifice, he feels, he sees that all actions are the workings of Prakriti but in the larger sense. From the working of Prakriti, Nature, it is the Divine Being, the Purusha who draws the enjoyment. So it is a Cosmic play that the Prakriti is enacting and the Purusha enjoying. The Tantric position is that man is intended to participate in this cosmic sacrifice, to draw disinterested joy, delight from the activity of Nature, Prakriti which works through him. Prakriti does not work by itself. Prakriti consists of three Gunas: Tamas, Rajas and Sattva and they are there in each being, and it is through these gunas, modes that Prakriti functions.

The Mother points out, in another context, that the Divine Will that works is supreme. It is the ultimate, but the Divine Will always acts through the individual wills, through my will and yours, whether we are aware of it or not, whether our wills are faithful instruments or not; the higher will acts through the will of the creature. Similarly the seeker who performs the sacrifice participates in this enjoyment by the Divine Being, the Purusha, in the acts of Prakriti. He does not seek it. He works as a consecrated offering, offering up of his energies but with no desire. And if there is a resultant joy, he lets it happen, he participates in it. The joy of desireless action is infinitely superior

to the joy yielded by desire-motivated action, because one desire satisfied leads to another desire to be satisfied.

This seeker knows, realises, that the various gods, deities to whom sacrifices are offered are not really different from the Supreme Godhead. They are all powers and personalities of the Supreme. So we are assured that what we offer to the gods reaches the Supreme. To whomsoever we offer in ignorance or partial knowledge, it reaches the highest. Naturally when it is offered direct to the highest, the results are quicker but one cannot always shoot direct to the highest, one has to go through the gradations of existence.

If man has no desire, if a sadhak of the type envisaged by the Gita has no ego, no desire, what is he to work for? The Gita makes an important point, a contribution in emphasising that it is for *lokasangraha*, for the holding together of the peoples. It is those who are advanced, who are in a position to set an example, that have to work for a totally unselfish objective and that is for the world, bringing about the unity of the peoples, harmony among the peoples; that is the goal, that is the undeclared objective of the seeker and should be of a community of seekers. There is in the process an inner giving up and yet there is a physical doing of works. All the difference lies in the approach, in the attitude, in the objective.

In developing these points, the Gita gives a symbolic meaning of yajna whereas the older Vedic symbolism was more mystic. It had always a double sense, one for the common laity and the other for the initiated. But the Gita brings out its true significance into the open. And the symbolism of the Gita is cast in a larger sense. It summarises the whole philosophy of sacrifice in one memorable

verse. It says, "For one who is so dedicated, everything that you do, whether it is eating, taking water, thinking whatever, it is *brahmārpanam*, offering to God, *brahma havih*, Brahman is the ghee, ghee poured in oblation, *brahmārpanam brahmāgnau brahmanāhutam*. The fire in which the offerings are poured is the fire of Brahman, the person who offers is imbued with the consciousness of Brahman. Such a person, arrives at the truth of Brahman, *brahmaiva tena gantavyam*. And what is that kind of person? *brahma karma samādhinā*, who does action inspired by the Brahman consciousness, whose actions reach Brahman, are motivated by Brahman. So each step of sacrifice is related to Brahman, the Divinity. This verse is used both individually and in collective functions before taking food. That is the most material sense in which the mantra is used.

But there is a higher context also: the senses are offered in the fire of control. We have got so many senses. They are collectively offered in the fire of self-control. The sense-objects are offered in the fire of purified senses. When they present themselves to the senses, the senses do not jump on them with greed, with grossness, but they accept them in their purified status. The senses offer into the yoga of self-control. This is the higher meaning of the yajna. We receive objects of sense-perceptions without the mind getting affected, without the mind getting influenced or disturbed because the senses turn into the fire of sacrifice. Discipline of this type stills the senses. In the previous stage, the senses themselves are turned into fires of sacrifice. In the next, the senses are stilled so that the soul in its purity may appear and take cognisance of life-experience. There is also a discipline by which through

a process of search, the Self is known —*jnāna*, and all action thereafter proceeds out of the still and tranquil soul.

One classification relates to the offering of physical objects. That is called *dravya yajna*. There is an offering of psychological processes, that is called *tapo yajna*. And the third is yoga. Yoga itself is turned into sacrifice, every step of yoga. In all these, the principle is to subordinate the lower activities to the higher aims. And from the larger point of view, sacrifice is the law of the world. Physical offering is the least. The Gita goes on to point out that sacrifice of knowledge is the highest. You do not rest in knowledge, you offer the knowledge that you have to the source of knowledge. That is why Lord Krishna says, all action culminates in the highest knowledge, *karma akhilam jnāne parisamāpyate*.

All beings are realised to be the becomings of the One Reality, the Brahman. They become, *bhūta*, and the Self is realised to be the source of all existence, not only the source but also the goal of the journey of life.

The main pathway to the Self is through action done in the enlightened spirit of knowledge. Both have to be combined: activity is not enough even though it be desireless; it should be enlightened by knowledge; knowledge of the processes involved, knowledge of the nature of the Reality to which you are to arrive and, as he says elsewhere: charged with the spirit of love, of devotion.

The main thing is to convert every output of the energy of life on every level, physical, vital, mental, spiritual, into offerings to the Divine; thereby not only their status, quality, is elevated but even the doer, one who performs, also undergoes a process of purification and gradually

identification with the object of sacrifice. That in brief is the significance of sacrifice.

14. The Lord of the Sacrifice

The central idea in the Gita, as we have studied it so far, is that sacrifice is an eternal truth that connects God, the world and works. This central truth, however, has come to be interpreted in a number of ways: the relation between God and the world, between world and the individual. They also have been defined in many exclusive ways but if we are to derive a practical guidance to our daily life, our understanding of these problems must be synthetic and total, which would include the partial truths propounded by exclusive schools. The fundamental truth of the Vedanta is that all is one Brahman. One Reality sports itself as many. So, all being is one Brahman, all existence is the wheel of Brahman. Overall there is a divine movement. Our world-existence is a divine movement emanating from God and eventually returning to God. Ultimately there is Nature, acting and enacting, offering itself to the Divine. The process is first through the involvement of the Self — Involution, followed by a gradual evolutionary movement.

Man misses this truth of life that it is really Nature's self-offering to God. And why does he miss it? It is because of his ego, he appropriates to himself the result of works, activities. He thinks he is the person who works, he it is who acts. Naturally he claims the fruits, the results of works. This cuts across the entire meaning of life. Man separates and appropriates to himself what really belongs to Nature and to God. That is why there is suffering, there is pain, there is so much of evil, violence, everything

contrary to what should be. The main offender is the ego, consequent ignorance, falsehood, vitiating the right attitude to life, to Nature and to God.

When, however, man awakes — whether by process of evolution or by circumstances, shocks of life, — he realises that this world is not centred around him at all. Each one likes to believe that he is important, all the world turns to serve his interests. When things do not subserve his interests those contacts are bad, those that serve are welcome. So we have a very false picture of the inter-relations of life. When by the Grace or by enlightenment man turns to the higher truth of himself, he finds that what he has been thinking to be his own activities are in truth Nature's activities. When he looks deeper, he finds that Nature is not really working to satisfy him so that he may aggrandise himself but for the enjoyment of God, who is the Master, the Lord of Nature. Nature herself is a Power of God. Naturally she works for the Master. Man in his limited vision loses sight of this fundamental truth of life. But when he awakes he finds that with or without his cooperation, Nature has her way, Nature compels him to serve her will. And he who richly enjoys the fruits of works is the Lord, the Lord of Nature, the Lord of existence. When man awakes to this truth, the stress on his personal self dwindles. He realises that the world is larger than himself, the world can get on without him. He knows that his self-importance is a myth, with the result that he recognises that it is Nature who does the works; he has no rights, no proprietory rights over the results of works as they belong to the Lord of Nature, Master of his being.

When we speak of the Master of being, it is the Divine stationed in the individual. Prakriti acting through me,

offers herself to the Master of works stationed in me. Both Prakriti and Purusha have their individual station in myself. I had better recognise that I am not to interfere in the play that goes on. I will find it more wise, more practical to stand by, to witness, to become a *sākshi*. It is the sacrifice by Nature to the Lord and I am only a witness. This position recognising that I am only a bystander and a witness to the function of Nature is the first step. Gradually, once this first status is realised, there is a shift, a raising of consciousness. I realise that the Divine Person, the Divine Purusha is there not only as related to Nature but also as related to my Self. Looming over the Purusha is the Self, the Self which is One in all. It supports the individual Self but is universal in character. It is an impersonal Presence, immobile, immutable.

When you realise this state of lodgement in that immutable Self, what is the position of works, actions? Actions have a meaning, you would say, when there is somebody to receive the results of the works. But when you arrive at a state of consciousness where you are one with the Impersonal Reality, the Impersonal Atman, how do actions come in the picture? There is nobody to receive, nobody to enjoy because there is no personal formation.

The Vedantic position is that actions lose their value, their significance once you realise the Atman; this seems to be justified because it is immaterial to you what works are done by Nature, what works you are obliged to do by your station in the society. On the face of it, it looks very plausible, but that is not the last word. The Gita points out that there is a Beyond; the personal, the impersonal, the individual and the universal, the mutable and the immutable, the kshara and the kshara, mobile and immobile are

two aspects; contrary in appearance but complementary in fact they are aspects of a greater truth, a greater being, the Supreme, the Purushottama. He is the Lord of all existences. He exceeds the determinates of the personal and the impersonal. They are only his aspects. And ultimately, the action of Prakriti is referred to that Supreme Lord of whom all the powers, all the gods that we adore and worship are emanations, agents of the Purushottama, who exceeds all values, all modalities, gunas, all statuses. And it does very much matter what action takes place, in what spirit it is done, what is the attitude behind it. So, even when one has realised the Atman, the actions continue to matter. One does not and cannot renounce activity simply because one has come to realise the Self. Activity, the Gita explains, is a law of life. Activity derives its true significance only when it is converted into a sacrifice. And sacrifice, as we have noted, is a consecrated offering, not something self-denying, not something with a touch of pain, compulsion, but a joyous movement of self-giving.

Seen from that point of view, works, activities are the natural path for the journey from the human to the Divine. This is the broad perspective, the fundamental truth that the Gita affirms again and again.

Coming to certain details, how do you transit, how do you cross over from the first stage of the individual Purusha to the Impersonal? Sri Aurobindo explains that as you take the right attitude and develop your aspiration, you begin to realise that it is not only your self that is important but there is also a Self in others. And it is a sign of culture, of development of consciousness when you begin to recognise the right of the Self in each person to live, to function, as much as you have. So this regard, recognition

of the Self in others, brings in an element of ethics. You are no longer selfish, self-centred to centralise everything around yourself. You extend your horizons and you embrace larger and larger sections of humanity; you participate in the universal movement, you make a move from the individual status to the universal. In this very movement you perceive that there are other powers than the human which we may call deities, gods or goddesses, who are at work in the universe and religions develop. So you add the ethical and supra-physical element and dimension to the normal human. These are various steps in your growth towards the Divine.

The wheel on which the whole journey proceeds is inter-change. You cannot live without it. The first tendency is to think that harm comes to us from others. We shut ourselves from others in various ways, anticipating harmful contacts from others. We hardly concede that wrong things can go from us to others. This recognition of seeing ourselves in others' shoes is a spiritual gain, to come out of my shell and participate in the life or the feelings and thoughts of another; that itself shows that the doors are opened to a larger existence.

From the tamasic, from the rajasic, one steps into the sattvic region. Still it is finite, still it is personal. That itself can become a prison, one has to go beyond in the universal dimension. It is in this zone of impersonality that the finite loses itself. As you go forward higher, the finite consciousness embraces the infinite, the finite and the infinite coalesce.

So, to sum up, to see all in oneself raises one out of egoistic ignorance. To live in it is to acquire peace and spiritual foundation. Reconciliation between the way of

knowledge, of understanding these principles, and the way of works, which is a translation of a rendering of our knowledge into life-terms, is a special contribution of the Gita. First, the new and enlarged significance given to sacrifice by the Gita. Second, establishment of sacrifice or inter-change as the law of life. It is really an inter-action between Nature and God. The third, recognition of the three statuses of the Divine in manifestation; the personal which we can understand at our human level, the impersonal which we can conceive and even experience after we are sufficiently mature spiritually, and the perception that there is a Supreme Person, Purushottama, above both who receives, oversees and justifies all that exists, and even all that we think does not exist.

15. Principle of Divine Works

We note that the central theme of the Teacher's exposition so far has been the institution of sacrifice. In the earlier chapters there is, indeed, a denunciation of the sacrifice as enunciated by the Vedic champions and that is understandable because whatever *sacrifice* may have meant in the original age of the Vedic seers, it had acquired a derogatory meaning in later times as something to gain passport to a paradise beyond, to enjoy the pleasures of life. The message of the Veda had been turned into one of hedonism, the principle of pleasure. And the Gita does signal service in rescuing this institution of sacrifice from the disrepute into which it had fallen and raising it to a new significance.

We have reminded ourselves that sacrifice in the English language indicates some sense of pain, deprivation and in that sense it is not an accurate rendering of the Sanskrit word *yajna*. Yajna is self-giving. The Gita turns this movement of self-giving into a high means of liberation — liberation from ignorance, from desire, from ego. And it indicates the way to do it. Traditionally, in the Vedanta, for instance, actions were frowned upon as disabling agents that tie down the performer into the net of Karma. So they said, for one who seeks to realise God — Brahman, actions have to be minimised, cut down to the bare minimum, and only those actions done which support the yogic effort. Shankara continued this tradition: if certain actions are inevitable, well, they have to be done with

a spirit of detachment. This led to a certain devaluation of life, depression of the life-current. Now the Gita does great service in resuscitating this institution and converting it into a means for perfection of life.

The teacher proclaims that the Creator, at the beginning, created men and creatures; he also created the institution of sacrifice and said: by this interchange, men and men, men and gods, increase yourselves. How do you increase yourself by sacrifice? Sri Aurobindo draws attention to the key concept of Purushottama, the Transcendent Being that serves as a backbone to the movement of sacrifice. Normally the human being is involved in activity motivated by desire, by ego, by the sense-demands. Well, once he takes to the higher pursuit of truth, he withdraws from this activity. This is the quietistic approach by which you abandon works, give up participation in the world, cancel yourself from the world-movement. But that is not the intention in Nature. It is necessary, indeed, to detach yourself from the hold of ignorance, from the hold of desire and rise into the consciousness of the Impersonal Self — Atman. From the hold of Prakriti you liberate yourself by yogic means into a detached poise of the being, the Self. That does mean, in effect, rejection of the world, repose in the silence and the peace of the Self.

Good enough, but is that the end? No, says the Teacher. He says, "In the Self, then in Me." Arrival at the impersonal Self, in personal consciousness, is the foundation for realising the transcendent consciousness, the Purushottama, who is above the personal and the impersonal aspects of life.

The impersonal personality, if you can call it so, is above nature but it is also active in nature. It can act right

in nature because it stands above nature. As long as you are involved in nature, the modes of nature, you are not free. But once you take your stand above nature, then you act through the Shakti, through the self-nature, its effective force, just as the Purushottama standing above both the poises is still present, still active in the world, through his Shakti, through his Self-nature, Maya, through his effective force, Prakriti.

These are the three different grades of his puissance. The lowest is Prakriti, executive nature; higher is Maya — Self-nature of God and still above is Shakti, himself as power. So instead of a transient world, *anityam asukham*, unhappy temporary world, you are promised *rājyam samṛddham*. To the extent you participate in the consciousness of the Purushottama, the transcendent Self, you also share in the kingdom on earth where you are the *svarāt*, self-ruler, and *samrāt*, all-ruler. It is not enough in this philosophy to be self-ruler, to rule yourself, to become your own king, which means ruler of your personal nature. You are required to rule over all nature: *samrāt*, but with a spiritual royalty of consciousness, just as Janaka and other great yogis did. Works continue.

The question may arise, for what purpose? What has the person got to realise? What does he expect from works? Why should he work? The Lord cites his own example and says: It is not a question of what you expect or what you get from works. I do not need anything but if I were to desist even for a moment from activity, these worlds would go to blazes. So, follow my example, be above the rule of the gunas, above nature, but still act. Act for what? *Lokasangraha*, holding together of the peoples. It is this concept of lokasangraha, that you have a responsibility for the

weal of the peoples, whom you may have exceeded in your consciousness, that has received an organised expression in the Mahayana Buddhism, where concern for the human beings, concern for all the creatures on earth occupies a pre-eminent position.

Next, he points out, whatever you may have realised, whatever state of consciousness you may have reached, whatever knowledge you may have possessed, you cannot impose it on others. You should not forget that each one has his own nature, own truth — the truth of the moment, the truth of the day. You cannot and you should not create confusion in the minds of those who are still behind — *na buddhi bhedam janayet ajnānām* — do not cause confusion in the understanding of the common folk. Allow them to evolve in their own way. Be a standing example but do not disturb their understanding. Do not impose your teaching which may not be relevant to the state of consciousness of everybody. This is a very important instruction, recognising the truth that there cannot be one teaching for everybody. There cannot be one mode of action for everyone. There is what is called *adhikāra-bheda*, variation in competence. Each one has to grow through the truth for which he has qualified himself.

Sri Aurobindo remarks that there are few more important verses than these seven couplets — verses 20 to 26 in the Third Chapter in the Gita. They enunciate certain fundamental principles which every spiritual seeker has to keep in mind.

Next, he draws attention to the fact that in India, the social tendency has always been to subordinate the individual to the society. That is our social structure. The individual has to serve the interests of the collectivity. But that

is not the whole of the Indian thought, the Indian approach. In religious and spiritual matters, Indian tradition has always been loftily individualistic. Each individual is recognised as an entity by himself, with a right to live his own life, may be in the overall setting of the society. But the aim, the goal of life has been individualistic. The Gita has always in mind the master-man, the man who arrives at a master consciousness. And, he says, this ideal of an individual who arrives at a God-state but still has concern with the world around, is the Vedic Charter of life given in the Aryan society. Man has to exceed himself, not exceed himself in the society. You do not immolate yourself in the collectivity but exceed in godhead. You can transcend yourself in the Divine Consciousness but not in a collective consciousness, which is always necessarily at a much lower level than the individual consciousness. This is repeatedly emphasised in the Gita.

Once again, he draws attention to the three modes of the Self: the Kshara, mobile, changing status, buffetted by circumstances, moved by desires, gusts of nature. At its highest, the Kshara also is an aspect of the creative Divine, the Divine in movement, the Divine working in companionship with nature or in apparent slavery to nature; that is the Kshara — the Divine involved in Nature. Next is the Akshara, unmoving, immobile, immutable Self, unconcerned, aloof from everything but always watching, witnessing. It is the Being of which all else is a Becoming. This is the Akshara. But that is not the last station, the destination. Still beyond is the Purushottama, the third, the highest Self who is without qualities, and yet full of qualities, *nirguno guni* — a contradiction in terms drawing attention to the fact that the Supreme cannot be held and

grasped in the mental logic. He exceeds definition. He cannot be circumscribed in mental formulas.

Parallel to this conception, there is the paradox of the kinetic person and the quietistic. We all belong mostly to the rule of the kinetic person, we cannot do without activity. We cannot sit quiet for a while. Even if we are not physically active, the mind is doubly active. Opposed to him is the quietistic person who is prone to silence, to retirement, to a certain repose — repose in his self, in his soul. Now, these two, Sri Aurobindo underlines, are not contradictions; they are the double term of manifestation. Both are necessary for the creative Divine to manifest. Meaningful action, meaningful activity has to be supported by a quietistic attitude. There must be a transcendence of the movement somewhere in your consciousness even when you are active. The whole of yourself shall not be involved, lost in the movement of activity. You realise that activity is the function of Prakriti — Nature. And you take your stand in the soul-status, which is impersonal. This impersonal status is a necessary foundation for the right functioning of the personal movement. This is possible because both these are self-poises of a third status — the Supreme Person. And this Supreme Person, as far as the Gita is concerned, is embodied, manifested in the person of Lord Krishna. He who is seated in the heart of creatures *hridi sthita*, He who is above, transcendent — the Purushottama is face to face with Arjuna, as Krishna the Divine Charioteer.

Is it possible for the Supreme Transcendent Divinity to take human form? Is it possible for the Divine Consciousness to assume a mortal form? There we come to the threshold of the great truth of Avatar. Sri Aurobindo next

takes up the question of the possibility of Avatarhood, the truth of Avatarhood and the role it plays in the evolution of this universe. We have had occasion to touch upon the subject earlier but now it will be a more systematic study of Sri Aurobindo's exposition, enlarging upon the cryptic verses in the Gita.

I am sure most of you have been seeing the Mahabharata serial on the T.V. every Sunday; the famous verse when the Lord manifests as the Avatar is beautifully rendered in the presentation. This faith that the Supreme cares for the world, takes birth on the earth when things require his intervention, is deeply rooted in the Indian race. That is why the concept of Avatar in form, whatever form, on earth, comes naturally to the Indian mind. And an Avatar, in the nature of things, cannot be a one-time affair. It is a repeated phenomenon at several junctures in the evolution of the earth being. Whenever Nature evolving its consciousness reaches a peak period beyond which it cannot proceed on its own, there is an intervention from above giving it a lift, a new truth and ushering in a new age: the descent of God — *avatarana*.

16. Avatarhood (I)

It is an important Chapter that we are studying at the moment and that concerns the possibility, the necessity and the fact of Avatarhood. Sri Krishna speaks of it to Arjuna and observes that this knowledge is a very ancient yoga. It was given by him to Vivasvan, the Sun-God, who in turn passed it on to Manu, the primal man and from him it came to Ikshvaku, the progenitor of the Solar race and in course of time it fell into disuse. And it was being freshly given to Arjuna because he was fit, was a friend, a companion and a disciple of Lord Krishna.

This yoga is described as embodying the highest secret, *uttamam rahasyam*, because it goes beyond the Impersonal Brahman. Normally in spiritual traditions, you liberate yourself by attaining the Impersonal Reality or you cultivate and link yourself with the personal Deity. To put it differently, you attain to a state of knowledge but without action: the state of beatitude. These are steps, indeed, to something beyond, a realisation which contains the whole secret. It goes beyond but it also contains the truth of the Impersonal and the Personal. It is an integral reality touching, leading Godward all the powers of the being, not only the power of action or only of knowledge.

The Gita has spoken of the one Self in all existence. It has spoken of the three-fold Nature. It has spoken of the possibility of utilising actions to attain to a state of knowledge, and proceeding from knowledge to the performance

of actions. But there is a secret still beyond and that is of Avatarhood, the descent of God in human form.

Arjuna is bewildered because Krishna speaks of those ancient days, when he gave it to Vivasvan millenniums ago and yet he sees Krishna before him. So he asks, how can it be, I see you are here, how were you there? The Lord does not reply directly but tells him: indeed there have been many births both for you and for me, but I remember them, you do not. And then he passes on to develop the knowledge of the descent of God, incarnate Godhead.

Now the question of the incarnate Godhead: it is accepted that beyond this world of birth and death and change, there is something unborn, but it does not stay always unborn. He, the Unborn, stands upon his Nature and comes to birth by his self-maya. The Unborn has his Maya, power of conception, his nature — Prakriti, power of execution, and pressing upon the Nature he loses himself into these multiple myriad existences. And why does he do that? It is for the deliverance of those who are ready to go beyond the rule of ignorance, the slavery to nature, but are unable to lead on their own. So he brings a fresh impetus and helps by his very existence in human form to help humanity to cross over. And he says: he who knows the right principles of my divine birth, he comes to Me when he passes from here. Indeed, most men adore and work, sacrifice to the gods. There are various gods and they worship them, sacrificing to them because that fruit is very swift. But this swift fruit is also swift in spending itself. It pertains to the world where it has been directed. It does not go beyond.

The divine self-fulfilment is more difficult than satisfying the gods. And this divine Godhead, though unborn,

releases himself into this world with which he maintains relations. And he says that it is he who has established the four-fold Law of works, and yet he is above. He sees to it through the operations of his nature and this four-fold Law — knowledge, power, production, organisation, service — all have to work out their destiny through this four-fold order. Where things are not observed, where the ideals are abandoned and there is a premium on non-righteousness, *adharma*, the Godhead descends. But Sri Aurobindo points out that to uphold the Dharma, the four-fold Law, cannot be the sole object of this mighty descent of God. God can get it done by his omnipotent power through men, heroes of distinction, men of courage, genius, through the Vibhutis. The Divine does not need to come for that. There is a greater purpose, a more divine aim and utility. There are two aspects of divine birth, which we have to keep always in mind. One is the descent of God, the Eternal in human form. There is a continuous descent of divinity in human receptacle. This applies not only to the periodical Avatar but also to the eternal Avatar. The eternal Avatar is the presence of God in you and me; but we are normally unaware of this Purusha in us. But that makes no difference to the Presence, to the in-dwelling Godhead, which guides and leads through the yoga-maya. This fact of the eternal Avatar, — the continuous descent of God at the human level is one aspect. The second is the ascent of man into godhead. This is a two-way process, the descent of God and the ascent of man. And as man ascends, it is the second birth of the soul. When any of us succeeds in taking birth in a divine consciousness replacing our human consciousness by the divine, it is a second birth. It is a new birth but not of the body but of

the soul, the second birth of the soul. And the purpose of Avatarhood, the purpose of Dharma is precisely to ensure and promote this new birth of the soul individually and collectively.

In this process an Avatar by manifesting divine nature, in what is outwardly human nature, sets a model for man to follow, to mould himself in that highest possibility of divine birth at the human level. That is why the Avatar sets the example, the Avatar gives the strength and the inspiration, he stands at the centre of this law of ascent and descent. He stands, as it were, at the gate and the gate is also the way. He is the way, he is the gate. Oneness of humanity with the Divine Being is always emphasised. Whatever may be the objections of philosophy, whatever may be the cynicisms or criticisms of dialecticians, the fact remains that at a certain level there is a oneness between humanity and the Divine Being. That is why they speak in the Bible that the Son of Man and the Father above are one. Jesus Christ calls himself the Son of Man, representative man, and he speaks of God as the Father above. And at a certain stage, he says both are one, to underline the oneness of humanity with divinity.

Similarly, Krishna, who is the Godhead in human form and the Supreme Purushottama are one. Krishna mentions again and again that many may not recognise, "those who are in ignorance despise me because I inhabit a human body, but I and the Supreme Lord who presides over the cycle of existence, I and He, are the same." Now this sentence that 'men in ignorance despise Me who is lodged in the human body', indeed applies to Lord Krishna when he speaks to Arjuna, but it also applies to the eternal Avatar. That is why Sri Aurobindo says: even with the evil man

you probe and seek the divinity in him because even in the worst there is God. Maybe he is more veiled than in you and me, but God is there in every human being, in everything for that matter. And those who despise a person wholly, entirely, also despise the Godhead dwelling in that person.

This truth of Avatarhood has to be understood in the context of the various other truths that have been enunciated so far in the Gita. The first is the One Self in all. Next, there is a Godhead seated in the heart of all creatures. The Creator always keeps, maintains his link and relation with his creation. He says, "I do not need to work for anything, I have nothing to gain but if I were to cease from working even for a moment, all these worlds would go to perdition." He keeps an active relation with the creation.

We have recognised that there are three states: first is the state of the doer, next is the state of the witness and third is the Purushottama, who even when remaining as a witness can act. At our level, one who is a doer cannot witness, one who is a witness cannot do but at the level of the Purushottama, the Supreme Lord, he not only presides, he not only watches but also acts through his Nature at different levels.

And there is the idea of Vibhuti, the pre-eminent manifestation of the divine power or quality in human being; not an Avatar, it is something less. It is interesting to note that Lord Krishna is both a Vibhuti and an Avatar of the Lord of the worlds.

According to the Vedantic view of the existence which is generally accepted in our land, all is God, all is the Spirit, which is self-existent. The ultimate is self-existing. It

is not a product brought about by a cause. This Self has its own nature, which is a power of its consciousness. All the creatures that we see are soul-forms, body-forms of the Original Being. Through the power of consciousness the world exists, the individual exists. Individuality in forms does not affect the unborn nature of the Spirit.

If the Reality is infinite, how can it assume a finite form? Sri Aurobindo points out that the assumption of the imperfect by the perfect is the whole mystic phenomenon of the universe. How and why the Infinite assumes the finite form is the mystery. And it is a mystery that cannot be solved by logic but by experience in consciousness. After all, what is the finite? Finite is there because of the infinite supporting it from behind. In other words, the finite is a self-representation of the infinite for a purpose. The infinite limits itself by its own choice to a state of finiteness. It is not compelled. It is because it is infinite that it can express the power and the choice to reduce itself, apparently, to assume the finite form. So the finite, instead of disproving the existence of infinite, justifies the infinite because there is no limit to the capacity of the infinite to shape itself, to form itself in any manner it likes.

We should also note that the imperfection is in the phenomenon. It is not in that which assumes that imperfection. Just as with the Sun, the defect is in the eye that perceives, there is no defect in the Sun itself. The imperfection lies in the phenomenon and not in That which takes on or plunges into the phenomenon.

God rules not from a distant heaven but by an intimate omnipresence. Now, this is a conception very difficult for certain philosophies to accept. But spiritual experience needs no philosophical justification. That is what is meant

by immanent godhead. In everything there is the divine presence, that is why it is called omnipresence, not in an abstract form but intimately. A thing exists because there is the intimate presence of God within it. And Sri Aurobindo remarks humorously that God's rule is not of an absentee, not an indirect rule but a direct rule.

Normally in us the rule is from behind, "in the cavern heart of things". There he is seated and he deals through nature. There are various veils of ignorance. And it is to establish the possibility of completely breaking through these veils and obstructions and acting overtly and not covertly from behind that the phenomenon of Avatarhood takes place.

17. Avatarhood (II)

To round up our discussion of the subject of Avatarhood: we have discussed many aspects, the purpose of Avatar, the practicability, the different concepts of Avatar and it is time we take an overall view of the subject.

There is, we have known, an Eternal Avatar. The Eternal Avatar is the Divinity that is lodged in the heart of every creature at the core of its existence. And it is because of this presence of the divine Reality that we exist. We may or may not be aware of it, that is another matter. There is also another dimension of this presence of God and that is the Universal Godhead in the type of humanity; it is not confined to the individual but is also in the universe. The universal Godhead is not just a total of individual godheads, it is something more. It is the Spirit, — as it is called in the English language, — that pervades this entire universe. And what is the Spirit?

Spirit is self-existent Being. We are not self-existent beings. We have come to birth due to certain extraneous causes. We are maintained in our life due to the operation of many circumstances but the Spirit is dependent upon none. It is sole and it is self-existent with infinite power of consciousness and an unconditioned delight of being. Its delight is a self-delight, it does not depend upon outer or other factors for its radiation or for its joy. And this Spirit, which is the presence of the Divine Reality, this Consciousness of the Spirit, — or Spirit as Consciousness, — is present

even in the atom. The smallest formation of matter is instinct with this consciousness. But this consciousness of the Divine works behind the veil. It is always covered, whether in material formations or in individuals like us. We are not aware of it. But it is not going to be always like that. There is a continuous effort for that godhead to break the veil and work in the front. It is not possible, however, for man as he is to break this veil, whether in the individual or in the universal. And it is to break this veil that the Avatar takes a special birth and works in a manner that is suited to the state of evolution of humanity at each step.

Normally the divinity within us works through our Prakriti, what is called Maya. It is imperfect nature and necessarily the action is imperfect. But when the Avatar takes place, there is a forceful downward pressure. He is not content to act through Nature as she is but he exerts a special pressure to work out his intention. He stands upon Nature and releases himself into this world. And this birth is first a soul-birth. It is not a physical phenomenon. An Avatar is not just the son of a particular parent but first it is soul-birth and then there is the frontal manifestation. The purpose of this divine manifestation is manifold. The Eternal Self of each man is God. We have an eternal Self. We have also, from another angle, a universal Self. The universal Self is that where we are one with the universe. So there is an eternal Self, the universal Self and the personal Self which is part of the Godhead, *mamaiva amshah*. When we speak part of the Godhead, it does not mean a piece or a fragment of Godhead, because God cannot be fragmented. The Divine Reality is a whole. And wherever it is, it is as a whole. It is a way of putting things that it may

take microscopic form but it is not something that is cut out from the whole Reality.

Man forgets by ignorance. Still, as he develops, God within shines through the coating. The more man is developed, the more is the emergence of the concealed godhead in each person. And, as we noted, it is to help and expedite and lift up the evolving human soul individually and collectively that the Avatar comes into being. The first purpose is to exemplify that it is possible for a human being, human consciousness to rise into and change into and manifest the Divine Consciousness. So the Divine takes a human form, acts in a human way and still puts out a divine afflatus. That is to show that it is possible, if only man were to make the effort, to manifest the divine Reality, the divine consciousness, even in our imperfect human body.

That is not all. Even when the Avatar departs, he leaves an influence, an influence which is dynamic, which guides and goads every aspiring soul to walk on the same path. Krishna has come and gone, Rama has come and gone but their influence is active still. Even an image, a representation of Rama or of Krishna on the T.V. screen does evoke a certain vibration in the viewer. That is why the whole of India is glued to the T.V. at the Mahabharata hour and as it did in the Ramayana hour. They leave an influence and that influence does not wither with time. It represents a mould of divine manhood in which the imperfect man can shape himself. It gives a Dharma, a law for spiritual growth. By its action, by its influence the Avatar helps human march Godward and gradually prepares for the Kingdom of God.

Note that the eternal Avatar is always manifest in the inner humanity. The periodical Avatar manifests at certain

crucial junctures in the evolutionary course of humanity. This much is granted. Then what is the process, how does an Avatar come into being? We had occasion to discuss about pre-eminent qualities of God getting manifest in certain persons. Certain divine qualities are exclusively concentrated and radiated in some individuals, and we call them *vibhutis*. So, is a super — Vibhuti an Avatar? That is the question. Sri Aurobindo says no. An Avatar is also a Vibhuti, but a Vibhuti is not an Avatar. An Avatar has something distinctive; a Vibhuti is not conscious, need not be conscious that the power he wields, that the qualities he shines with are divine. He may attribute them to himself, to his own valour. Certainly a person like Napolean, like Shakespeare, never thought that the qualities that were manifest through them were divine or derived from the Divine. All these Vibhutis are, however, necessary steps for the decisive emergence of the divine Being.

Then there is the concept of certain heroic individuals being looked upon as partial Avatars. In the Vaishnava tradition they speak of weapons of God, weapons of Vishnu, taking birth as individuals. Balarama is said to be such a manifestation. Also qualities or certain powers of God are manifest in some and we can say that they are partial Avatars of the powers of God. Ultimately, it is the divine qualities that are manifest in them. But that is not enough. An inner divine consciousness must govern the external nature by its very presence.

Then there are instances of human souls, calling down the descent of God, by special spiritual effort. The person is possessed, so to say, by the Divine, and he becomes one with the Divine. By sheer aspiration, sheer Grace he invokes and embodies the divinity. Even that is not an Avatar. You

may unite with God, you may embody a Godhead but that is not an Avatar.

Due to entire purification, force of aspiration, an identification at the top or at the core with God, there is a kind of reflex action of the Divine entering into the human parts. That is a partial Avatar. The human receptacle holds the divine charge but the person is there even before this thing happens. There is the instance of Chaitanya for instance. They are called *amsha* Avatars. There are periods when they are no longer devotees, no longer human but they act and speak and live like the Godhead. For instance, all his life Chaitanya was a powerful devotee, an intense Bhakta but in certain high moments he acted as the Purushottama himself. Nobody could mistake him for a Bhakta at that time. He was the Lord. Now even that is not a full Avatar. At that moment the Divine descends in that person and acts. So you may call it a partial or an *aṃsa avatār* but not the regular Avatar.

Incidentally, Sri Aurobindo makes a reference to the Christian concept of Trinity. They speak of the Holy Father in Heaven, the Son — Son of God, Son of Man, and the Spirit. He points out, in the context of what he has been discussing on the phenomenon of Avatar, that the Holy Father is really what we call the Lord, the Purushottama above both the individual and the universal Godhead, in the Inner Heaven, not the heaven of the mythologists but in the Inner Heaven of the being, He is the Lord. And His Nature, Nature of knowledge and light — *parā prakriti*, becomes the jiva, the individual soul, the Son. He manifests on earth, he becomes the Son of Man. And the pervading Spirit is the Holy Ghost uniting the Supreme Lord in the Heaven and the Son of Man on earth. So,

there is a continuous, intimate relation between the three. The Trinity is for the purpose of manifestation. The Son of Man, before he manifests on earth, is the Son of God. Son of God is the supreme Nature of the Lord taking birth as the Son that is manifesting. With human birth comes the Son of Man. All the while there is the Spirit, the Holy Ghost uniting the three.

The Avatar, Sri Aurobindo points out, is a dual phenomenon. There is a divinity and there is humanity; a divinity taking on humanity — human nature, human form in order to establish certain truths. So the Godhead which is manifesting has to act in a human way. If an Avatar were to act only in miracles, though miracles are not tabooed because they are no longer miracles to him, still an Avatar will be an Avatar even without a single miracle. Even with imperfections, outer imperfections, an Avatar is an Avatar. The imperfections are legacies of human nature as it is and the Divine elects to function through human nature at that level. It does not reflect on the divinity of the Avatar. This is what Sri Aurobindo repeatedly points out when he asks why should Rama not have human sentiments, how does it affect his divinity? So also certain critics point to the supposed drawbacks or shortcomings in the avatarhood of Krishna. It is purposive, deliberate, to point out and demonstrate that the Divine can house Itself, express Itself through imperfect nature as it is, thereby giving an assurance that even you and I, imperfect creatures as we are, can hope to rise, to invoke the Godhead, unite ourselves at some level of our being with the Godhead, with the Divine and walk with the divine consciousness.

A divine being on earth, in the present conditions, need not be faultless, need not be perfect in our sense of

the term. Miracles are incidental. If the Avatars were to function only through miracles, it would be beyond the reach of humanity. Again and again the example is set, the possibility is affirmed.

Another question: how does he take birth, how is the body prepared for the Avatar? Sri Aurobindo rules out the common material explanation that it is heredity: it is physical circumstances that prepare the body and the soul comes afterwards. He says, no. According to all spiritual experience, it is the soul that prepares the body. Even for common people like us, it is our soul that chooses the environment, chooses the parents and elects to enter into a particular womb. So behind our birth as human being there is much at the level of the soul. If this is so in our case, much more it is in cases of Avatars.

Speaking of the ten Avatars, the parable of ten Avatars to which we have referred earlier, Sri Aurobindo observes how it points to the truth of re-incarnation. The same divine Godhead, who is engaged in this periodical and increasing manifestation of divinity in human form on earth, goes on preparing the bodies. So, it is God who prepares his body; or, he says, there are the great human Fathers, four Manus, who prepare the bodies and the Divine descends into them. He leaves the question pretty open but the fact is that the Divine chooses, it prepares the body which it is going to assume. It gathers material, it selects the spot. It is not by heredity, it is not by physical circumstances that an Avatar is judged. But it is in the self-choice of the Avatar which form it takes and where.

This is, in brief, the outline of Sri Aurobindo's approach to Avatarhood. The Avatar has a purpose, a method, a role to play in evolution. Discussing the number of ten

Avatars, he makes an interesting remark. Krishna comes earlier in time than Buddha in the list; in action he is later than Buddha because Buddha came for a particular truth, a partial truth of the Nirakara Brahman and Krishna came to establish the truth of the Lord of Ananda, a positive manifestation. And, he says, he is the last because even Kalki, the traditional Kalki is not to bring any new truth but to continue the work that Krishna has initiated.

And we know that the purpose is not yet complete. The Mother of Ananda has still to manifest, the Lord of Ananda has still to establish himself and that cannot be till the truth-consciousness, till the truth-power establishes itself, clears the way; then only the divine Ananda can take root. That means a continuation and and an enlargement on the work of Lord Krishna.

18. Avatarhood (III)

We noted that the divine Avatar has an external form and an inner form, an external personality and the inner truth of the particular manifestation. Discussing this question in his "Letters", Sri Aurobindo asks, why should an Avatar always succeed in the external sense? Why should Rama not weep? Why Rama should not have kama? (And he adds, of course, whether the actual Rama bothered to do these things is another matter.) The point is that there is an external human side to every Avatar and the real personality which may or may not be perceptible to an average eye but which is the real truth of the Avatar. Every Avatar, having accepted a human frame, a human body, is liable to certain human frailties occasioned by circumstances, the *samskāras* of the society and we would be ill-advised to judge an Avatar all by his external actions. There is always a double sense, a double form, an external sense, an external activity and side by side an inner sense and an inner form.

As with the Avatar so also with the work for which the Avatar comes. There is an outer side and there is an inner side. We have to remember that an Avatar comes not merely for outward action. Almost always without exception for an Avatar to come there must be a crisis in consciousness. It is only a crisis on the level of consciousness that calls and invokes the descent of the Avatar. External factors, the seeming causes in the external society are only

occasions and the real purpose is to effect a change in consciousness, an elevation of consciousness in the soul of the individual and the universal soul. It is not that as soon as an Avatar comes the changes take place in consciousness, but the way is laid, the steps are formed for a gradual change. What the Avatar marks is a radical point of departure in the course of evolution. We cannot judge the value of the results of an Avatar by external events. There are changes, departures in the field of the intellect, in practical life, social, political changes, all pushing the horizons forward. Sri Aurobindo explains that these can very well be done by exceptional personalities which are called Vibhutis in the Gita. He cites how in the case of Reformation in Europe or in the French Revolution in France, there were radical changes but they were not spiritual and the persons who effected these changes were in the mould of Vibhutis and not of the Avatar: An Avatar always leaves a spiritual residue. An Avatar may have the effect of changes in the intellectual or the practical life but that is not the main purpose.

Outwardly the action of an Avatar may seem to be a restoration of Dharma. Here again it depends upon what significance we give to Dharma. Dharma is not a social law, a moral standard, a general codified law governing the life of the society; it has to be taken in its deeper sense. Derived from the word *dhṛ*, to hold, it is not only that which holds together a society but which also helps us individuals to hold to the society. It has an individual and a collective significance. Dharma has to be understood at different levels. And in the case of Avatar it is not in the social sense, political sense, moral sense, not even in the religious sense but in the spiritual sense that we have to

understand it. Thus is the case of the Avatar of Rama, the Avatar of Krishna; it is the spiritual function, the spiritual mission for which they came and worked that is important.

Popular accounts of these Avatars tell us that Krishna came to put down wrong-doers like the Kauravas; Rama came to subjugate the titans headed by the ten-headed Ravana; Parasurama to redress the injustice caused by the Kshatriyas; Vamana the dwarf-Avatar to pull down, subdue the titan Bali who was threatening to overwhelm the world. But this outer account does not give the spiritual sense of each Avatar. If only the external results and not the spiritual significance were to be emphasised, neither Buddha nor Christ would be included in the list of Avatars for in India it is not Buddha's religion or any spiritual contribution that has survived; it is the compassion, the ethical and the philosophical outlook for which the Buddha is revered. Buddha's effect on the Indian society is in other spheres than the spiritual. Sri Aurobindo also analyses how Europe struggled and threw away the spiritual contributions of Jesus Christ and though they retained the name of Christianity in name, it is only the social and the ethical content of Christianity that has been imbibed by the European society. Nothing of the spiritual core has survived in Europe. Thus there is always a double work of the Avatar. There is the inner progress of the soul and the outer change. Outer changes are more easy to grasp but the inner progress is difficult.

The work of an Avatar does not cease with his physical withdrawal. When the Avatar passes away from the earth-scene all is not over. The effect continues, continues for centuries, for all time in fact. The results are more spectacular when there is the physical withdrawal. So the effect

of an Avatar is not confined to the physical innings of the Avatar. It continues even after passing, leads to a powerful change and leaves a strong effect, a permanent power for inner living and spiritual rebirth.

The effect of the Avatar of Rama or the Avatar of Krishna continues centuries after their physical appearance and withdrawal. That is because their main contribution is on the level of the spiritual and the truly religious aspect of life. That is never exhausted even when the results of the outer action are worn out in the process of time; the spiritual change continues to be a permanent heritage.

The Gita is singular in its approach to Dharma. The Buddha established the Dharma, the eight-fold path. Then there is the Sangha, the collectivity which pursues the Dharma and there is the personality of Buddha. Similarly with Christ, there is the way of life brought in and established by Jesus. There is the Church, in the place of the Sangha they have got the Church representing the collectivity and, of course, the Personality of Christ. The Gita, however, extends these three significances in a universal context. The Dharma of which the Gita speaks, the Dharma which Sri Krishna came to establish is universal in its outlook and approach. The Sangha is the entire humanity. And the personality, the Avatar, the Gita points out, it is not just the physical personality of Krishna that appeared on earth and disappeared but it is the Supreme Divinity which the earthly Avatar represents. The Gita makes it very clear that Krishna himself represents the Purushottama. The reality of the Avatar of Krishna is that he is an embodiment of the Purushottama consciousness. This goes beyond the religious, sectarian appeal of an Avataric message.

The Unity that the Gita emphasises is the unity of all humanity. In a spiritual sense it is the oneness of life, not just those who accept this particular religion of Vaishnavites but it is a Vedantic unity by which my soul, my self realises itself to be one with the Self of all. Also my self contains the entire universe in essence, in principle. The Vedantic unity extends the significance of the Sangha to the whole of human race.

The Gita takes up all human relations and raises them to their divine nature. Lord Krishna says: even when men worship the lesser gods and sacrifice to them, it is to Me that they reach. Through the various gods men reach the Supreme. So they are not to be looked down upon. And every human relation can be raised and elevated to a divine status. One can approach the Divine in any way that is natural to one. In whichever way the human approaches, "that way I accept him to my love." That is the assurance given by the Avatar in the Gita. It has not been exceeded by anyone till now and indeed it is very difficult to exceed it. It is this work started by Lord Krishna that is being continued by subsequent personalities.

Speaking in this context, Sri Aurobindo draws attention to the inner struggle that is there in the individual and obviously there in the collectivity of every society. The forces of progress Godward and the retrogressive forces that stand in the way are celebrated in various terms in the different mythologies of the world. Everywhere when there is a crisis, it is the Avatar that intervenes. The Kingdom of Heaven is to be brought not only in the individual but also in the collectivity. Each Avatar leaves a brick in this edifice of establishing the Kingdom in the collectivity, side by side establishing it in the individual human soul.

The divine Avatar not only brings a new truth, a new power, a new consciousness down to the earth but simultaneously he releases forces and powers which exert themselves on the soul-level of individuals to raise them, to open them to higher revelations and urges them godward. Those who are ready move forward, those who are not yet ready, get ready. So, no work of an Avatar is lost. Outwardly the results may not be visible but in the inner context the results are there on every soul which is evolving.

The speciality of the Gita is that it emphasises on the Divine Personality which exceeds the human little figure which was known to the Pandavas and the Kauravas and the people of that age; it is something vaster, vast in power, vast in love in which the entire humanity is drawn to himself by the Supreme Purusha.

To recapitulate: Like the Avatar, the work of an Avatar has a double character, the outward and the inner. The outward draws attention more easily but on that account the work is not to be measured in terms of the outer effects. Due to Krishna's intervention, the forces of evil and falsehood led by Duryodhana are eliminated, true, but that is only a part, a fragment of the work done by the Avatar of Krishna.

Sri Aurobindo emphasises that merely for the establishment of Dharma and putting down those who lead the unrighteous cause, an Avatar need not come. A Vibhuti can do that work very well. To put down evil, to promote the good, a Vibhuti is enough. An Avatar comes for the still higher and a more comprehensive purpose. The full content of Avatarhood cannot be exhausted by the external effects. They are more or less symbolic as the permanent contribution of every Avatar is on the inner side.

19. The Divine Worker

The theme today is the divine worker. Who is a divine worker? A divine worker is one who works for a divine birth and a divine birth means a change of consciousness from the human to the divine. Even after the change, doing works as an expression of the change of consciousness, even as works are utilised before as means to the change. This is the gist of Karmayoga as has been developed by the Gita so far.

How do you recognise such a divine worker? The signs are invisible because they are spiritual and supraethical. You cannot recognise divinity in a worker because of his morality or ethical nature; that has nothing to do with it. An average worker, however well-intentioned he is, has got a number of standards, guidelines, by tradition, by contemporary thought, by religion, by scripture. Each one acts according to his persuasion. And naturally there is a conflict in the modalities of the workers. Even after doing to our best lights, we wonder at some stage whether it has all been worth it, whether actions are not after all distracting, avoidable temptations and withdrawal from action is not the best way for spiritual liberation. That is how the common mind works.

If we follow the standards laid down by the Gita the first sign of a doer of this type is that he does not have the egoism of the doer. He does not feel that he is doing something even as service to the Divine, as even a sacrifice

to the Divine or discharging his obligations to the society, to humanity. Normally, everywhere there is the sense of the doer, 'I am doing'. Whether one foolishly expresses this I-ness or is clever enough to cover up with altruistic words, the person concerned knows very well what he is doing. He who works in the right spirit comes to realise at some stage that it is not he who acts but it is Nature, the triple-moded Nature that does. Nature functions through him. At a higher level of awakening he feels concretely that it is the Supreme Lord, the Master of his being who is acting through the instrumentality of his nature. He is only the channel. So he is not identified with the movement of Nature and he is humble enough not to claim identification with the Will in action, the Will of the Lord. He does not feel at any level that he is the doer. First it is Nature, next it is the Lord who does. He is a self-effaced individual. That is the sign of a divine worker.

The second sign is that the usual motivation of desire is not there. Ninety percent of our activity is due to impulsions of desire, desire of any kind, maybe desire for fame, name or desire for liberation, desire for economic advancement, whatever it is, there is the force of desire. It is desire that drives the person. But here the seeker, the worker, is careful to eliminate desire from his consciousness. He works not because he has a desire but because it is a work that has to be done. It is an assignment that has come to him and he does it. This does not mean that since he has no personal motivation of any kind he will do the work anyhow. The Gita is careful to point out that the work done without desire is more well done because of the absence of interference by personal desire. And since it is offered, consecrated to the Divine, the worker takes care

to make it as perfect as possible, *karmasu kauṣalam*; not efficiency alone but perfection in works is the watchword of a divine worker.

He does not have egoism; he is free from desire; he is also free from the sense of personality. In the process of self-effacement he completely subdues his sense of being an individual, he does not have even the sense of being an instrument, a chosen instrument, has an odour of egoism. the Divine worker abolishes his personality. Personality may be one of dash, maybe one of control, maybe one with an emphasis on rajas or sattva or tamas; to that extent the personal mode determines the shape of the works. A divine worker abolishes this personal mode. He is conscious of just being a channel, not even an instrument. The difference between a channel and an instrument is, an instrument is conditioned by the capacities of its nature but a channel is not. A channel is just a conduit through which something else passes. A channel does not have the modes, does not have the impress of personality. This impersonality of a channel of something high, through the instrumental nature, is the third characteristic of the divine worker.

Along with impersonality there is an effortless equality, an equality of the soul. Whatever the turn of events, whether one succeeds or one fails, there is a tranquil acceptance. He does what he has to do irrespective of the way things turn out. Very often what appears to be failure from the material point of view turns out to be an indispensable contributive factor to an eventual success. So, failure and success have very little meaning to one who is engaged in divine works. To his consciousness of equality whatever happens is the Will of the Divine. There are no

complaints, no regrets, no anticipations. He takes things as they come. Even if he is faced with the situation of battle, war, he is always a friend, he has compassion. If he kills, that too is from a higher level of compassion. He does not have enmity in his heart. Sri Aurobindo says elsewhere, "If thou hast to kill, kill with a love in the heart". It looks apparently a contradiction in terms but it is the truth. Love, because he is conscious that it is good for the person concerned to be killed. This is the truth that has been told a number of times in our Puranic tales of how an asura is a fallen god who wants the Supreme to deliver him from the bondage of human birth and death due to whatever curse and the Lord comes to deliver him by a swift stroke of the sword. So among the different types of relations that the human devotee has with the Lord, enmity is one. Perhaps no other tradition in the world permits enmity as a possible relation with the Divine. But here it is possible because it is out of a high compassion that one does whether the work is pleasant or unpleasant.

We spoke of absence of egoism, absence of desire, absence of the stress of personality, presence of a concrete equality of the soul; as a result of all these one distinguishing feature of a divine worker is that he is always full of an inner joy; whatever the work, whatever the circumstances, there is a causeless joy. Normal human pleasure and joy is caused by external circumstances. There are outer causes creating the vibrations of joy or pleasure. But in the case of a divine worker, in the case of a spiritually realised person, the inner joy is causeless and incessant. It may be a quiet wave of joy, may be bubbling of joy but it is always there uninterrupted by any happening. That joy is different from our human joy in this that human pleasure,

human joy brings in its wake a certain agitation, an excitement, an element of disorder at some level of the being but here the background is one of peace, a strong solid peace on the bosom of which there is this inner joy.

Now these are signs which certainly we cannot see from outside. They are invisible, they are spiritual. Outwardly the person's actions, his words may or may not conform to what the society regards as ethical, moral, he does not care. He knows the distinction between *tyāga* and *sannyāsa*, relinquishment and renunciation. He lets go the inner hold of things. Outwardly there may or may not be a conforming sign. He may not change his dress, he may not change his appearance, he may not outwardly renounce his material possessions but inwardly he does not have or exercise any hold. He relinquishes to the Lord, to the Divine, to the Higher Power. As a result, nothing touches, nothing hurts. That is why he is called 'unpierced by grief or pain', *avranam*. He is not hurt. And he has peace because he reposes his works in Brahman. He reposes what he has to do and he lets the results accrue to Brahman; he does not concern himself with it.

Another feature: though he begins by withdrawing from Nature and watching the actions of Nature, after a while he learns to transcend Nature, not stand aloof but to rise above Nature. And there he realises that even Nature works out the Will of Supreme Lord, the Purushottama. We may think that Nature works mechanically, or that Nature works according to the individual human will but if the human will is withdrawn Nature will go on repeating the same cycle. But when one rises above Nature one realises that Nature was all the while executing the higher Will of the Purushottama.

For this worker when he exceeds his personal formation and steps into the impersonal consciousness, that too is a stage. To arrive at an impersonal consciousness and work in that spirit is not the final stage. That is the base for him to repose in the Will of the Supreme Lord, the Maheshwara. So it is the Higher Will of the Supreme Lord that acts, not the will of Nature, not the will of his ego. And works rise from a spirit that is free, that is above, and like waves of the sea they disappear without modifying the spirit. That is, works done by a divine worker do not have a karmic effect. They do not affect his consciousness negatively. Works help him to identify himself with the Lord of Nature and he becomes a kind of focus for the Supreme Will to execute itself through his instrumental nature.

These are the characteristics of a divine worker: no egoism of the doer, no desire and yet perfection of works, impersonality, equality of soul and an inner joy and peace, rising above Nature and realising identity with the Supreme Will of the Lord.

20. Equality

Equality, as commonly understood, is an attitude of endurance. Whether the content is pleasurable or painful, one endures without reaction. This is known as stoic acceptance of life. One does not go under when there is an unfavourable impact, nor does one rejoice when there is something that gives happiness. This stoic attitude is really a tamasic quality. There is something in each one of us which is loath to adventure. It does not want to move. It wants to stay put and it gives all kinds of explanations to itself that things are not worth the trouble, they will always be the same. This lethargy in Nature, prone to idleness, centered upon oneself, is equality based on the tamasic quality, the guna of inertia. Nature permits this play of avoidance, of endurance, in order that man is spared from hurt from contacts which he is unable to meet squarely. It is Nature's strategy of ensuring the safety of the individual who is not yet ready to face the battle of life. Nature tolerates, promotes this tamasic indifference. This is not the equality that the Gita speaks of.

If the stoic equality has a tamasic character, there is another grade of equality which takes life as it is and bears the impacts and contacts without flinching. That is the rajasic mode. One may get hurt in the battle of life but still one has the sense of asserting oneself. It may be painful at the moment but when one recalls one has a sense of pride that one faced the crisis. This is also Nature's strategem to

draw man away from the hold of tamasic inertia. The bait of dualities, pain and pleasure, is held before man so that he is tempted, he moves forward. Whether he is able to satisfy his desires or not, to meet the challenge of life is enough for him. Victory or defeat, success or failure is not of paramount importance. This is rajasic equality.

Then there is a philosophic equality of one who is enlightened, whose mind is developed, who feels and sees the transience of things, that the truth is not here as things are but elsewhere. Yet he faces life, subjects himself to the shocks of life but with a certain detachment. This is the sattvic equality.

There is the fourth one and that is a religious or a mystical equality of resignation. One takes everything that happens as the Will of God, as a divine dispensation and bears it. This is a typically Christian attitude. All these, however, are mixed up in any individual. An essentially tamasic equality may at times have the character of a rajasic equality persuading itself that life is meaningless, one has to take things as they come, but there is no certainty of anything in life. Or the tamasic man may have perception of the sattvic equality that the world is empty, reality is elsewhere, it is no use exerting oneself. Similarly, even a sattvic equality may have in some way its origin in the tamasic pull downwards. These are all plays of the various gunas which man in the common run is familiar with.

The equality, however, that the Gita espouses is of a different character. It does not belong to the play of gunas, inertia, dynamism, light and balance. Beyond them there is an equality of the soul. And that equality is based on not only the perception but even the experience and realisa-

tion of a basic oneness of life. That oneness proceeds from the Reality which we call Brahman. One who realises this in consciousness sees Brahman everywhere and nothing disturbs his equal vision, his experience. Indeed it is accepted that it is the One Reality which deploys itself into the innumerable many.

Now, as long as you are lost in that sense of unity, stay in that status of oneness in Brahman, the question of equality does not arise. It is only when you enter into relations with the many that there has to be an equal poise, an equal fronting to all the contacts. Though it is the One which expresses itself into the many, the relation with each of the many has to be different. Underlying all the differentiation there is an equality. A true equality can only be an equality of the spirit, because it is only at that level that there is a perfect oneness. And where there is oneness, there is no inequality. At the level of Nature everything is unequal. Things may appear similar, like each other, but there is a differentiation. Equality is not at the level of Nature but only at the level of the Soul, the level of the Self.

With this background you will appreciate the demand of the Gita for a minimum of equality, if the discipline of works, of knowledge, that it advocates is to be embodied. It is only when the mind is calm, the being is anchored in a fundamental oneness that you have an equal and an equalising spirit. It is the nodus of the free spirit's free relations with the world. There is a free play of relations from the soul, from the spirit, but it is centred round this fulcrum of equality.

This equality is both a sign and a test for the seeker. A seeker has arrived at a basic realisation when he experi-

ences a spontaneous equality in his consciousness. It is also a test for him at each step of his journey whether the contact with the world, with all that happens in the world, evokes any reaction or leaves him equal. Where there is inequality it is an indication that the play of gunas is unequal. One guna predominates over the other and there is a deviation from knowledge because knowledge is consciousness of unity with the One. Where this consciousness is strong, established, there can be no inequality.

The Gita's equality is above the gunas. It is spiritual, it is high, it is universal in character and comprehension. It is not confined to an individual attitude; it participates at the level of the Self with an intrinsic sense of equality. Mere equality on a philosophical basis has been an ideal for ages. But that is not what the Gita advocates. As we observed, the stoic poise based on austere endurance and the philosophical poise based on self-mastery by knowledge, detachment, intellectual indifference, what in Sanskrit is called *udāsina*, are only two steps of ascension of consciousness. This austere endurance which is the stoic poise and the philosophical equality which is based on self-mastery of knowledge by discrimination, by detachment, are the two steps. The first is the heroic indifference, *titikshā*, the sage indifference is *udāsinatā*, you stand above with a philosophical detachment and you are unmoved. And the pious resignation of the Christian, of the religionist is *nati*, bending. The Gita enlarges and elevates each of these.

Note that in the mind's shrinking from the dualities which is at the base of the tamasic recoil, in the play of dualities which leaves a rajasic nature exhausted at the end, the dualities are really based on the soul's enjoyment

of the dualities. The mind's experience of the dualities is different; the way the dualities are registered at the soul level is different. The soul may even rejoice in a painful contact, in suffering, as in the experience of a hero in battle. The soul grows, that is why at times the soul welcomes a hard experience from which the mind, the average mind shrinks.

The tamasic equality can only be the first incitement, starting point. What is required of the seeker is not to flee, not to turn away from the call of life, but to acquire mastery. Accept the necessity of struggle before you can master. That is the rajasic stage when you recognise that you have to engage yourself in the struggle for life before you can master it. Simply by shrinking from it, staying away from the battle of life, you cannot master. You have to accept the challenge, face the pain and the pleasure in order to master them. That is why the Gita calls upon Arjuna to accept the situation and conquer. But that is not the ultimate. Both the tamasic and the rajasic lead to the sattvic vision of knowledge, — not the knowledge of the mind, but self-knowledge. In this discipline of the sattvic knowledge, you recognise that you have a lower self, you have a higher self. Both are legitimate in their provinces but you uplift the lower self with the aid of the higher self, *uddharet ātmanātmānam*, the higher self lifts up the lower self. That is possible only when you have the discriminating knowledge between the higher and the lower.

The Gita's equality bases itself essentially on the Vedantic knowledge of unity of life that all is One. Higher than the mind it is based on the Self, the experience and the realisation of the Self, which is situated beyond the three gunas. Ultimately, it is not the lonely freedom that a

sage enjoys shutting himself up in his enlightened vision but it is the experience of Divine in all things, in all experiences of life, that is the call of the Gita, *sarvabhūtahite ratah. ātmani ratah* is well, but that can only be a stage. The *ātma ratih* has to be communicated, made a stepping stone for taking the *rasa* of life in service, in action, — *loka sangraha*. Lokasangraha does not mean, as commonly understood, service to the society, social service, but communicating the liberating knowledge to those around, not to be shut in one's spiritual shell of selfishness.

We have to be on guard against the dangers of the tamasic equality which easily strays into abandonment of one's call. It leads to *sannyāsa* and reluctance or withdrawal from work in the world. One rises above the rajas and the tamas in order to get a footing in the sattvic equality and from the sattvic equality to transcend oneself in order to find the base in the one Self which sees and exudes the consciousness of unity with all.

Another danger of the tamasic equality is, there is a temptation to communicate that attitude to unfit souls, to those who are not ready to get into the spirit of the tamasic recoil but would make it an excuse to shirk, shirk their duties, desist from their responsibilities on the plea of equality. Real equality is only when you face the ups and downs of life and not when you shut yourself in an inner bliss. That is precisely what Lord Krishna calls upon Arjuna to cultivate, to accept the challenge of life and win or lose. He assures him, of course, that he is going to win but apart from that it is a duty and he has to do it. Whether he wins or loses there has to be the spiritual equality, an equality which is above the gunas. That is the prescription of the Gita.

21. Equality and Knowledge

Yoga and knowledge are the two wings of the soul's ascent to the Divine. In this context yoga proceeds through offering of works, — works done without desire in a spirit of equality as offering to the Divine. And knowledge is what supports this desirelessness, this sense of equality, consecration of works to the Divine. Both these interacting, mutually supporting, stimulating each other, make it possible for the human soul to journey towards the destination in the Divine Consciousness.

The essential step is the yoga of works, indeed, works which are reposed in Brahman; they are not done because they have to be done or are compelled by Nature. Because of the spirit in which the works are offered and done in the sense of consecration, these works do not create the binding karma. Brahman is indeed the Immutable who is above the modes of Nature, above the operations of desire and ego. He is both above and within. Ultimately it is the Divine who is the Master of the works. But in our ignorance and its product ego, we do not realise that we are not really the doers but it is somebody else. And this Brahman is, as the Gita describes, *samam brahma*, equal to all. This equality, which is the fundamental consciousness in Brahman, has to be cultivated and made part of himself by the seeker who wants to practise the yoga of the Gita. When this equality is imbibed, he does not care whether the works are successful or not because he not only offers

the fruit of works but even the works themselves. The seeker does not exercise any choice in works. It comes to him as an assignment.

And this knowledge which provides the basis for equality is expressed in our nature as equality in temperament. On the heights of being it is something larger, *jnāna*, the supreme Self-Knowledge. We have to distinguish the knowledge spoken of in the Gita in yogic context as totally different from intellectual knowledge. It is not masses of data, information but it is knowledge of the Self, knowledge of the Reality. All other kinds of knowledge are products of the intellect. They do have their role, they are not to be condemned. They do contribute to the growth of consciousness. Science, for instance, science as we know it, is not this knowledge. It concerns itself with the process of things, with the principles underlying them. The Higher Knowledge probes through this knowledge of processes and principles to find out the underlying Reality. But before it can do that, the role of science is admitted.

Similarly, psychology, is only a preliminary phase of knowledge. It gives us an awareness of the complexities of our nature, of our lower self, of our higher self. And once we learn to cross over from the lower nature to the higher, we enter into the knowledge of the Self. But to be able to do that we need a preliminary grounding in psychology so that we know the different parts of our being and we know what is to be integrated, what is to be transited. That is the service of psychology.

So too philosophy. It discusses and arrives at an understanding of the various principles of existence. But what is the reality of each principle in the totality of existence, that only spiritual Self-Knowledge can give. Philosophy

prepares the mind and gives us some idea of the different principles of existence. Similarly ethics. Ethics as a branch of knowledge trains our mind in evaluation of what is good, what is evil, what is sinful and what is virtuous in the normal terminology. But the role of ethics is over once having known what is right and wrong, we take a decision and shut off the negative from us and form the positive qualities in us. And there is aesthesis. Aesthesis also is not the knowledge of the Self but it prepares us to experience the Divine as beauty. The value of beauty, of harmony is contributed by the science of aesthetics.

And, of course, knowledge of the world, what is called practical knowledge. It is not the self-knowledge, no doubt, but still it prepares for the higher knowledge. It gives us an inkling into the various laws that govern the human relationships and it prepares us to appreciate how behind all varying human relations there is something underlying, something governing. And in the higher knowledge we begin to grasp the dealings of the Divine in the world. So from the human we step into the Divine realm of knowledge. All these are preparatory to the real knowledge and mind is only a reflector of this knowledge which is above the mind. This is what the Upanishad calls *aparā vidyā*, the lower knowledge preparing for the *parā vidyā*, but you cannot have Para Vidya, the higher knowledge, without a grounding in the lower sciences. They are not to be dismissed but each one cultivated in the fuller context of life and utilised for a rounded perfection.

And how do we get this knowledge, this supreme knowledge, the knowledge of the Self, *jnāna*? It comes from the seers who see. The seers are those who vision the knowledge. The Veda calls them *drashtārah*. They do not

intellectualise, they do not speculate, but they have a clear vision and they see what is what. That is why they are called the seers. A seer is different from a knower. Knower is one whose faculties are exercised to grasp an object of knowledge but a seer is who is very passive and it comes before his inner eye. The seers are described to have seen the mantras. The hymns of the Veda are not products of intellection. They come from the seers who see. But more often and more truly, this knowledge comes from above, also from within. Both within and above, the range is above the senses. The senses, the sense faculties have no role in the building of this higher knowledge.

Once we have the opening and we let the mind receive and reflect the higher knowledge, we need to have faith, faith in the certainty of knowledge, in the existence of truth as knowledge. That certainty we lack at our level where we function with the logical mind. We always have doubts, we commit errors and we need to check and counter-check. And Sri Aurobindo points out that it is, indeed, necessary in the state of ignorance through which we have to pass; doubt has its role, scepticism has its role, but once we go beyond, we need to have faith, we cannot question and our faith justifies itself in the long run by revealing the fundamental basis and the truth of the knowledge that we have.

And it is with reference to the doubts, to the errors and the legacy of errors in our mind that the Gita refers when it speaks of cutting all of them away with the sword of knowledge —*jnānaāsinā*. The sword of knowledge cuts across this lower bundle of doubts and scepticisms. And with the dawn of this knowledge there is the beginning of the vision of all existence in Brahman, in the Self. And it is because we see that all is in Brahman, the Immutable Self,

that we begin to have a practical sense of equality. We do not distinguish between the lower and the higher, between the sinful and the virtuous. In a fundamental sense, for practical purposes, indeed, there is a varying of relations. But Sri Aurobindo points out that the Gita is very explicit that even in the sinner, even in one who has done the vilest deed, the Divine is there. And Sri Aurobindo asks, in which faith, in which other religion or philosophy, is such an unequivocal declaration made that God is there in the virtuous and the sinner and you have no right to close your eyes to the presence of the divinity in anyone? This produces an attitude of equality.

Elsewhere in answer to a question, when you know that a man is evil, that he is perpetrating wrong things, how do you expect us to see the Divine in him, Sri Aurobindo replies that you should probe through the exterior; the exterior indulges in evil, you have to go deeper and feel the Divine there. This requires a tremendous amount of patience and spiritual discipline. But are we to deal with all in the same way? Sri Aurobindo says, no. Evil has to be destroyed, evil has to be met on its own level, and you have to fight and put down evil because, in doing that you are truly serving the person who is perpetrating the evil. Of an evil man, his true interests are served when you put him down. You serve the higher purpose in creation which is to evolve more and more in consciousness towards the Godhead. That is how Lord Krishna asks Arjuna to kill and enjoy the kingdom. He has to kill as part of his duty. Now this is a daring approach and an explanation which satisfies our rational mind.

Another point: this sense of oneness, a divine equality *samam brahma* everywhere, is a Vedantic knowledge:

sarvam khalvidam brahma. The Vedanta stops there. He is there everywhere, the Self is there everywhere and you stay put in the Self. You do not bother about this world, about what happens elsewhere. But the Gita's speciality is: you proceed from that Vedantic knowledge of oneness to a *divine living*. You exert yourself in life, you do not shut yourself in the enjoyment of the soul but you put out your energies for the divine purpose in the world, for *loka sangraha*. The knowledge is put to practical use. Knowledge of oneness becomes the basis of liberating action in the world. This action of a knower, of one who has the knowledge is for the good of the world in fulfilment of the Divine intention. That is possible because he has the knowledge of oneness. He is not confounded by the apparent fact of multiplicity. The peace and the power of Brahman synthesise in one who has this knowledge of oneness.

We spoke of three kinds of attitudes: the stoic attitude where you endure without protest; the philosophic attitude where you realise the transient nature of things and are indifferent to what happens; and the attitude of resignation where you accept everything that comes as the Will of God and submit yourself. Sri Aurobindo draws pointed attention to the poise of the Gita in these very three attitudes. The stoic knowledge gives us peace because we endure, we do not allow ourselves to react, there is what may be called at the highest, a noble peace. But there is not the liberated joy. When the contacts of the world come on you, you do not have that free joy in participating, you have only peace. Peace is contributory and preliminary, the liberated joy is possible only when you have the spiritual knowledge. Stoic knowledge, stoic peace, lasts because Nature allows you to have that peace as you have qualified

for it. Sri Aurobindo draws attention to the institution in Rome in the early days when a slave who had qualified to be freed from slavery by his services, by whatever qualities, was called a freed man and that freed man owed his freedom to the consent of the society, just as the stoic man owes his peace to the consent of Nature. But a spiritually liberated man is a free man who does not depend upon the consent of the society or Nature. The Gita lifts stoic knowledge to a higher level.

Similarly, philosophic indifference gives a calm but not the spiritual joy. Instead of indifference the Gita teaches to have love for God in all. You embrace the world out of love because God is there. In the attitude of resignation, there is submission, a negative attitude of letting things happen, forbearance. But in the Gita there is surrender, an active self-giving which is something more than submission. The best that a religionist aspires for is to be a servant of God. But one with the discipline of the Gita aims at being an instrument of God, not a servant but one who attains identity with Brahman and because of that identity, the power of Brahman functions through him as an instrument.

So far we have spoken of our attitude to people, our attitude to the world, but what about the action of others upon us? There Sri Aurobindo says you have to distinguish between the practical nature of the impacts; where it is necessary to stamp out evil, to stamp out injustice, you have to fight. There you cannot be submissive, you have to fight without hatred; a very difficult proposition. In another place he says, you have to fight with love in your hearts, love because ultimately you are doing good to the soul by releasing it from its captivity in a frame that is given to

evil. You are furthering the evolution of the person. All this is possible, because there is a basic realisation of oneness. And that oneness is realised first at the level of the Self, because that Self is one with the Self of all. In another sense there is only one Self which is experienced distinctively in each individual.

This brings us to the close of the chapter on Equality and Knowledge. Real equality is possible only when you have this knowledge of oneness. This knowledge of oneness with its consequence of equality does not stand in your way of fighting evil, of putting down injustice. That has to be done in the spirit of oneness. There is no hatred or inner psychological violence. Arjuna has been given all these lessons so that he could learn to fight without bitterness, without any spirit of hatred.

22. Determinism of Nature

The subject we have for study today is a very knotty one, which has been subject of much debate, and that is 'Determinism of Nature'.

There is a school that holds that all is determined for man and he has no real freedom; things are determined by Nature or by his own karma, the karmic action represented by the planets and what is called fate. Man is not a free agent. This is one section. The other one holds that man has a will of his own. Maybe there is determinism at lower levels in Nature but with the arrival of the self-conscious being in man, there is play of free-will, freedom. The opponents point out, where is that freedom? Each man is subject to his heredity, hereditary influence at every level; physically is what he is most aware of, mentally and otherwise there is a strong hereditary strain determining how he reacts how he functions in life. Then there is the influence of the society to which he belongs. There is also the time spirit to which all human beings are subject. All these complex influences reduce the area of freedom to a very slender margin. Man may think he is free but he is subject to many influences, not all of which are apparent. This is the general argument.

Sri Aurobindo has his own answer but today we are not going to discuss what he says on the subject. We confine ourselves to what the Gita says. Sri Aurobindo makes an observation that the important statement in the Gita that

all creatures follow the Nature, what can coercion avail, — *prakritim yānti bhutāni nigraha kim karishyati, guna gunesu vartante*, gunas play with gunas, — seems to counsel that willy nilly you are driven by nature, you cannot coerce your nature. This statement along with another more important statement later on saying that each person has his *svabhāva*, self-nature, and according to that nature is his law, the law of being, *svadharma*, appear to give strength to the approach that man is driven, it is no use fighting one's nature.

It is an accepted axiom in western psychology also that human nature cannot change. Whatever laws, standards, you impose on man, they cannot radically alter his spontaneous behaviour. The Gita is careful to follow up its observation on the compulsive factor of nature with a distinction between essential nature and accidental nature. Nature with which you are born-which indicates the type of evolution that you are to, follow, which has been determined by your past line of evolution, that is essential nature. There is an accidental nature, a superficial nature which is constituted of the play of circumstances, the stamp of influences, the rush of events, the interaction of the various gunas in you: tamas, rajas and sattva. All these form the accidental or the superficial nature. And corresponding to that nature, there is the external ego-self. There is the ego which is the reference point, the focus of active ego-nature. Now the mind of an average man identifies itself with this ego-point and says: 'I am doing this action, I am not doing', and takes credit for what it does, glories in what he performs, That is the ego-self.

Behind the ego-self there is the true self, the real self which is not subject to nature. The ego-self is completely

involved in the movement of nature and claims credit for what is done by nature, but the true soul, the true self is superior to nature. It may or may not assert itself in the movement of nature, it allows freedom to nature to grow at its own pace in its own way. But it is above nature, above the play of the gunas on the surface. To put it in another way, there is the true soul and there is the desire-soul. The true soul is part of the Self, sharing its immortality, its immutability. The desire-soul is a creature of desire, its motivation is desire, therefore it is subject to the karma, karmic reactions of actions done with desire. The true soul, however, being above the play of the modes of nature, does not create karma because it has no desire. When the real soul, the true Self acts, it is in tune with the intentions of the Divine. It has no personal motivation, no personal desire, so it has no karma. This is the true position. So when it is said that you cannot control nature, it applies to the ego-self.

In the measure in which you pass from the rule of the ego-self to your true Self above nature, you have free will. Freedom of will is at the level of the person and not with the personality that is mixed with nature. In the world, as things go, there is a free play, an entire play of the three gunas. In the beginning we find it is a rule of tamas, inertia, there is no awakened will. Freedom can come only when you have a will, you exercise that will. But at the tamasic level, say in the stone, say in the atom, there is no self-aware will. Even if there is a will in inconscience, in the atom, it is not aware of itself. It is Nature that drives the force in the atom to do what it wills. There the Gita statement holds hundred per cent that it is nature that drives, it is nature that does.

Nobody blames a tamasic creature for what it does. There comes at the level of the animal the element of rajas always mixed with the element of tamas. But even with the force of rajas — dynamism, activity, movement, there is no will as such, there are the rudiments of will. Sri Aurobindo points out, you do not blame a tiger when it kills, when it devours, because it is its nature. When it is full, when there is satiation, it does not bother. Sri Aurobindo points out it does not bother because it is tamasic at that level. It has no will of its own. It is only as you rise in the scale of evolution that from tamas you can cross over to rajas, from rajas you cross over to sattva, the balancing light, but no-where is a single mode or guna entire by itself. Everywhere there is a mixture. And even to arrive at the level of the sattva does not mean that you have arrived at freedom. You have to go beyond sattva. A sattvic will, a sattvic intention is, indeed, more refined than a rajasic impulse and yet that too is an imprisonment within the mode of sattva. That has to be exceeded if you are to go beyond nature. He makes a very profound remark that at a certain stage you have to overcome even the desire for liberation in order to be truly liberated.

It is only when you exceed the role of the three gunas, *trigunātita* that you begin to breathe the air of freedom. To put it in another way, at one end there is absolute determinism of matter, at the other end there is absolute freedom of the spirit. At the intersection in the consciousness of man there is a reflection of this interaction of absolute freedom and absolute determinism. He experiences it as a sense of free will and he acts according to it. But even that is an unreal freedom. As long as he is subject to the action and the interaction of the gunas, sattva, rajas, tamas, he is

not truly free. Nature carries on investing him with a very fragile sense of freedom.

A question arises: granted that you arrive at a state above the play of the gunas, *trigunātita*, do you stay there? Do you avoid activity because that would be subjecting yourself to the influence of the gunas? The Gita is explicit on this point; you shift your status, your standpoint to a state of the soul that is above ego, free from desire. And when you act, you act automatically according to the Will of the Purusha, of the Lord of the Being and your nature becomes only an instrument. You have to act, action is the law of life, but you act as a free agent, as a pure instrument of the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Force. So, to transcend the action of the gunas does not mean renunciation of action, abandonment of activity in the world but performing with inner freedom, unaffected by actions and reactions of those around.

Sri Aurobindo also notes that for one who goes above and looks down, what we think to be free will is still subject to Prakriti, Nature. So it depends upon what level of consciousness or existence you function from. At one level it looks as if you have free will, from a higher level the same free will, the sense of free will, appears in its true colours that it is a very subtle subjection to the law of Nature.

So, determinism of Nature is a fact as long as you identify yourself with your ego-self, allow yourself to be motivated by desire and are subject to the play of the gunas. To the extent you move away from this subjection to the movements of nature, and you govern yourself more and more by the impulsions of the soul, function in the light of the Self, you begin to live in freedom. Ultimately it comes

to this that both free will and determinism are facts of life. That is what Sri Aurobindo says unequivocally that both are simultaneous truths operating in the universe. Real freedom is only at the highest level of the Master, the Master Purusha. Determinism obtains where you are completely subject to material Nature.

There is, indeed, the Prakriti and Purusha of the Sankhyas, that is one truth. But there is a larger truth which is the Vedantic truth of the three-fold Purusha, not just the Purusha for the delectation of whom Prakriti plays games. There is the active Purusha — *kshara*, the static Purusha — *akshara* and the transcendental Purusha, three poises of the Self. Similarly there is the double Prakriti contrary to the perception of the Sankhyan philosophy: Para Prakriti, the Higher Nature which is the Nature of God, of the Divine Self and the lower Nature which is constituted of the three gunas. You must have a knowledge of the whole, a total view before coming to conclusions on isolated statements in the Gita or any scripture. It is only a Krishna, one who knows the whole that can see things in the proper perspective. It is a mistake to take partial statements for eternal truth. They are true in their settings, in their movements, they are partial truths. A totality of vision perspective, has to be cultivated to coordinate and make one whole of the various aspects of the teachings and the wisdom enshrined in the Gita.

23. Beyond Modes of Nature

We have been speaking of the action of the gunas, modes of Nature, and how the worker wrongly attributes to himself the doership while, in fact, it is the modes of Nature that interact and do the work. How is one to go beyond these modes of Nature? It is understood that one is not really free unless one goes beyond the workings of the modes.

Normally when we say, I am doing this, I am the doer, it is the ego that claims the doership. We think the ego is our true self whereas it is really an instrument for the action of the Nature. So where is the question of free will? Some argue that the first initiating action, the choice that is exercised even by the ego, is free. It is only later in the working out of this will, initiated will, that the modes of Nature begin to act. This is only an appearance because even the first initiating action is a result of a long chain of the past workings of the ego, past karma, samskaras, and though we think we are free to decide this way or that, it is the accumulated pressure of the past samskaras that makes us inclined to take action this way or the other. Apart from the past samskaras, there is the seen and the unseen action of the present circumstances, the environmental circumstances; they also play a part in exercising what we think is our free will. What the ego imagines as its free will is not its will at all but the will of Nature. We fancy our will as something independent, something self-initiated, but it is really the will of Nature.

Our ego-idea appropriating the authorship to ourselves, the sense of free will, these also are permitted by Nature because they are the instruments by which Nature raises itself. It starts with the level of tamas, then rajas, then sattva and so on. It uses our ego-idea and our so-called personal will to elevate its own action. Even our mistakes, even the wrong notions are used by Nature to raise the quality of its action. The whole difficulty arises because of a wrong stand-point, a wrong placement of the ego-idea. I am; now when I say I, it is usually the ego that is conscious but that is not the true I. The ego, at its best, is a distant reflection in Nature of the true person, the Divine Purusha deep within. And what we call the will of Nature is also a reflection of the Will of that Purusha, however distorted, however deflected. Nature's will is ultimately a projection or a reflection of the Will of the Self.

In the course of this yoga, if we reject the ego-idea, the sense of free will, and realise that it is Nature that acts and we separate ourselves from the operations of Nature, what is the next step? There is no initiative to work. Once I withdraw my identification with Nature's will-in-action, naturally there is a kind of withdrawal. I lose interest in work. I work because I have to. It leads to a kind of dissociation with work leading to some kind of sannyasa, treating work as belonging to Nature; as long as Nature lasts, the work will last but it is a very superficial movement.

Sri Aurobindo points out that instead of this no-action, a greater action is possible. The action that follows dissociation with the ego or with the Nature-will is something higher, a greater action. The freer Purusha within gets scope. Sri Aurobindo points out how the Purusha of

the Gita is different from the Purusha of the Sankhya. In the Sankhya there is the Prakriti, Nature, and the Purusha. The Purusha is not active; as long as the activities of Nature are allowed to be reflected in the Purusha who watches, who identifies himself with Nature, there is action. But once the Purusha withdraws his consent, Nature slowly stops. The Purusha falls silent, there is liberation. But the Gita's Purusha does not; once he is free it does not mean that he becomes inactive, he assumes control. The Gita's Purusha is not just the reflector of the action of the Nature but the Master of Nature. Once you are free from identification with Nature the way is open to you either to withdraw from the scene and cancel yourself or to assume your rightful mastery over Nature. This is an important distinction between the Purusha of the Gita and the Purusha of the Sankhya.

Secondly, in the Sankhya philosophy, soul and Nature are two different distinct entities. But in the Gita both soul and Nature are powers of one self-existent Being, the Purushottama, the Transcendent Purusha. Soul and Nature are not different; both are powers of the Transcendent Purusha who is the Lord. Even after the cessation of identification, a greater action becomes possible because the Gita conceives of three Purushas, the Triple Purusha. That makes ascension possible.

To recollect what we have learnt in the Gita's classification: first is the Kshara, the moving, changing Self or Purusha involved in Nature. He is completely identified with Nature whether at the individual level or at the cosmic level. He is the soul manifest in Nature. Beyond the Kshara, the Gita points to the Akshara, the Immutable, the Unchanging, One without qualities. That is the Imper-

sonal. Kshara is severely personal but the Akshara is Impersonal. But that is not the end.

In many lines of Yoga, when you withdraw from the Kshara to the Akshara and station yourself in the Impersonal status, it is called liberation. But Sri Aurobindo points out, it is only a realisation of the quality-less Brahman or the Purusha. Still beyond is the Purushottama, the Transcendent, of whom both the Kshara and the Akshara are two aspects. The Supreme Ishwara is the highest status. A little lower is the Akshara, immovable, detached and yet pervading all impersonally. And at the level of the Kshara is the Immanent Will of the Purushottama, the active soul identified with Nature. So, all along it is an operation of the Purushottama Consciousness or the Purushottama Will. At the lowest, on the level of the mutable is the changing Kshara Purusha; above is the Immutable, Immovable, Impersonal Purusha and the highest is the Purushottama, holding both as his aspects.

In life, however, our ego-sense has absolutely no conception of these three statuses. It is always involved in activities on the surface and deludes itself that it is the author and is caught up in the interplay of the gunas. Even at the level of the Akshara, the Impersonal level, there is no unification. In one status there is aloofness, and in another, the front, the surface status, there is action. There is involvement; behind is the Witness-Self. So it is a double but not a unified being. Unification can take place only in the third status of the Purushottama. In either case sannyasa, renunciation of works, is a false rule. Action has to go on. Nature insists upon its activity because that is the law of life. So it is not renunciation but assumption of mastery; first liberation from Nature and then assumption

of control over Nature culminating in the mastery over Nature. That is the way.

Both Kshara and Akshara are unified as two aspects, static and the dynamic, of the Purushottama. Action as a result of the interaction of the interplay of the gunas is only at the level of the Kshara Purusha. Once you are above the operation of the Gunas, action is a free expression of the Will of the Transcendent Purusha. In this way our natural workings are slowly turned into divine actions. The only way to turn our actions in ignorance, actions of Nature, into divine actions in knowledge, is to get beyond the rule of the three modes. The three modes as we have seen are always inter-mixed. There is an element of tamas even in the sattvic state. There is an element of limitation, imprisonment even in the sattvic state. So, even the highest state of the three is a limiting factor. The gunas play their permitted role only as long as we function at the level of the ego-idea. Once the ego is dissipated, — and the best way to dissipate an ego is not to dismiss it but to replace it gradually by the consciousness of the true Purusha, — there should be always an evocation of the true being within and a conscious surrender to its presence. In the measure in which this inner being is called out and enabled to participate in life, the role of the ego diminishes. The ego is no longer required. The ego is there because Nature needs it as a focalising point for her diverse play of gunas.

Sri Aurobindo points out, each of these, the gunas, Nature, the ego-will, the sense of free will, — all these have a relevance and they are true at their level, in their context. There is nothing that is absolutely useless, meaningless in the reign of Nature. Everything that happens has

a meaning if only we have the eye to see it. Nothing is redundant, nothing useless. Nature uses everything in the Cosmos for its own purpose. Even when the human will initiates an action for its own supposed end, Nature has a way of utilising that activity for its own unexpected and unimagined ends. Nature can do so because Nature is not an ignorant principle as the Sankhyas would have it. Nature is a power of God.

We have discussed earlier how what is Shakti, Power, in the realm of knowledge is called Prakriti, Nature, in the belt of ignorance. As you ascend from the domain of ignorance, Nature, Prakriti reveals itself to be a Power, Power of God. This, in brief, is a study of the action of Nature through her gunas, how through the very gunas Nature raises its level, the consciousness of the person involved and when one assumes mastery over Nature, Nature becomes an instrumental power for the Will of the Supreme, the Will of the Purushottama. Towards that end the level of the mutable Kshara, the level of the Impersonal Akshara are necessary steps, one supporting the other, one making possible the other for assumption of the right status in the Purushottama Consciousness.

24. Nirvana and Works in the World

When one attains the state of Nirvana, where does the question of works arise? Nirvana is generally taken to be a kind of extinction, extinction of personality, of being.

Sri Aurobindo points out the distinction between the Nirvana of the Buddhists and the Nirvana of the Gita, which is closely modelled on the Vedantic Nirvana. In the Buddhist Nirvana, as it has been popularly expounded, there is a blissful non-being, you cease to exist. What happens thereafter is irrelevant because the counter-question is, 'Who is there to experience what happens? One is abolished.' So it is a culmination in non-being. The Nirvana of the Vedanta and of the Gita is Brahma-Nirvāna, Nirvana in Brahman. It is a merger of the partial person in the fuller being of Brahman, not an abolition, not an extinction but a merger of the individual with Brahman. It continues.

Looking back on the teaching of the Gita on actions, on works, we have noted that the traditional Vedanta looks upon works, more or less, as preparatory agents, purificatory factors, to rid the seeker of egoism; works cease to have relevance once one realises Brahman. If they are done at all, it is as a necessary evil. Contrary to this approach, the Gita lays great stress upon works both before the central realisation and after. Before realisation, the Gita develops a technique of converting a means of Karma into a means of liberation. It teaches how to eliminate the

personal factor from works, to remove the ego-motive, the desire-impulse and undertake work that comes to one's lot as an assignment, to offer it to the Lord of Works without expecting any fruits; and in due time the seeker is asked not only to renounce the fruits of works but even the choice of works. It is a progressive discipline of learning to work without a personal emphasis and using the field of work for self-purification, ridding of the egoistic movements, ridding of the impurities of desire and developing an attitude of equality. Success or failure, easy or difficult, an attitude is developed which regards and fronts all events with an attitude of equality. One also practises the yogic discipline described briefly in the sixth chapter: how one has to sit in a quiet place on a seat which is neither too high nor too low, sit in an erect position and draw in the mind and focus it at the centre of the eye-brows. One is to keep out the thoughts, keep out the sense excitations and practise this discipline of meditation, based on the Raja-yoga of Patanjali, strenuously till the mind is quitened, *chitta-vritti-nirodha*, the mind falls silent and there is a reflection of the Self "in the pure, limpid waters of the being".

This is the beginning of a movement of crossing over from the field of *kshara*, the mutable Brahman into the realm of the *akshara*, the immutable Brahman, where there is a great impersonality, where there is no person; all is a pervasive Brahman with his own stamp of peace, peace which is not disturbed by external happenings, an almost total absorption in the Brahman-Consciousness, untouched, unchanging, unmoving. This experience of the *akshara*, the immutable, the impersonal Reality should logically see the termination of works. Once one is withdrawn from the

field of activity and is absorbed in a reverse direction, merged in the immutable Brahman, activity should stop. That is the usual Vedantic position.

But the Gita does not stop there. It points out that the Peace, the Nirvana, the merger of the personality, immergence in Brahma-Consciousness, is not the end. The peace, the consciousness of Nirvana, blissful Nirvana that you experience in the Akshara, has its foundation not in the impersonal Brahman itself but in the transcendent Purushottama. Beyond both the personal and the impersonal, both the Kshara and the Akshara, is the Purushottama of whom these are two poises. And this Purushottama, the Gita points out, is the Lord, the Master of Works. It is he who witnesses and enjoys all actions. One who arrives at the state of the immutable Brahman and is open to the action of the Purushottama, visions everywhere the existence and the presence of the Lord, the Master of Works, the Divine Self. He begins to see the one Self, everywhere. In the state of the immutable Brahman, no doubt he is lost in the one Self but he is not open to the experience of a still another Self which enjoys, takes cognisance of the movements. The Impersonal Self which experiences in the Akshara Brahman, is a static self. But the dynamic side of life comes into the field of vision only when one regards the presence and the action of the Purushottama.

At this juncture the Gita brings in the element of Bhakti, devotion. Work, Karma dominates the field of Kshara. Jnana, the knowledge — knowledge of what is permanent and what is transient, what is personal and what is impersonal — dominates the experience of the Akshara Brahman. But it is Bhakti with its central point of love that rules the life once there is the perception and the

linkage with the Purushottama. So there is no question of abandoning works once you realise Nirvana.

The Nirvana proper belongs to the immutable Brahman stage. But that is not the end. One opens to the action of the transcendent Purusha who is not only in the universe but who is on the heights of our own being. And on the heights of our being we experience not only the consciousness of the Purushottama but open in identity to the same consciousness and the same action in the universe. This is the outline of the argument of how even after Nirvana, works continue. But works continue on the note of Bhakti, devotion. I realise the Brahman, the Purusha in myself, but I am also compelled to awake to the same Purusha around me. And my movement of surrender, movement of devotion to the inner Purusha is not complete unless I also participate in the movement of surrender and devotion to the Purushottama in the universe.

We recall how, when he realised the silent mind following the instructions of Lele, Sri Aurobindo found that the people, the city, the movements of traffic were all as if on a screen, they had no life of their own. They were fleeting images. And this experience of a kind of unreality of the universe continued for a while; but he had a deep feeling that that was only a transitional stage. And very soon he had the descent of power, light, knowledge coming from still higher spheres lending significance and meaning to the world-movement; he realised that the Divine is also here. So the feeling of unreality, the experience of illusiveness is perhaps a necessary stage to disinvolve ourselves from the world-movement which is normally caused and led by the movement of desire and ego and personal factors. It is Nature's technique to break the knot by putting

us through the experience of realising the world-movement as not real.

Mother observes that the world is, indeed, not true as it appears to us. The Vedantins stop by observing that the world is not true, not real. Mother adds a significant rider that the world is not real as it appears to us. To our ignorance, to our limited perception, to our jaundiced vision influenced by our personal background, the world appears differently to different people. But what is the world in itself? In itself the world is a truth of God. So, if you go deeper, probe deeper, the world reveals its reality as a projection of the Divine, of Brahman. And where there is manifestation, Brahman in action, there is movement, and movement means activity.

So at no stage do activities cease to be important. They play a necessary role in the early stages of the human journey, they help to get over the hold of tamas, the hold of inertia and inconscience. Assertions of oneself, even ego and desire, are used by Nature as instruments to make the human being move. And at a right stage, due to shocks and pains, one realises that actions by themselves have no meaning, they only bind. The approach is changed, actions are done indeed but with a different attitude, attitude of consecration, offering, — impersonal action. And this discipline leads to a gradual diminution of the personality of the worker, The worker ceases to be, he becomes only a channel. He awakes to the consciousness of the impersonal Brahman with its own serenity to begin with and positive bliss. The bliss of the Buddhist Nirvana has been described to be a negative bliss whereas the bliss of the Vedanta is one of positive bliss; for the person, the focus continues but within the larger being of Brahman.

And the impulse to action also continues because a seeker who has arrived at this stage is no longer concerned with the selfish enjoyment of bliss. Following the example of the Lord, he concerns himself with the well-being of the peoples, he engages himself in healing, in helping, in leading them, *sarva-bhuta-hite ratah*. And that he does in an ebullition of joy, joyous offering to the Lord. As he advances in his consciousness and opens to the action of the transcendent Lord, he greets the Lord everywhere. Sri Aurobindo points out that even with a person whom we consider evil, the attitude of this seeker is one of equality. He does not hate, he does not look down upon him because he is always conscious of the presence of the immanent Divine in the other person, only there is a disfigurement on the surface. Keeping this in mind he does not hate, he does not abuse, but he is always equal. Equal does not mean stoic endurance. As the Gita develops the thought, it emphasises that you derive equal joy of life from all experiences. It does not mean that you meet a pleasant experience and an unpleasant experience with the same stoic equality. That is a stage. But the ultimate stage is when you learn to derive the Rasa of life from things that are pleasant, as also from things unpleasant, from things which are mixed, because you always see behind the surface of things.

You see the whole Cosmos in a totality, not just the Kshara, not just the Akshara, but both of them with the background and in the context of the Purushottama, the Supreme Lord; there is the advent of devotion, of love. Devotion, when it is causeless, when it has no motive, is love.

Further passages in the Gita are devoted to enlargement of this Bhakti, devotion, in the life of a spiritual

seeker. As Sri Aurobindo points out, it is as if Bhakti is the most important element. Karma is all right, Jnana is necessary but both of them get their sustenance from devotion. And the Lord repeatedly says: "Be devoted to Me, live in Me in all states". And when Arjuna, the disciple says how difficult it is, — this discipline of going through all these stages and Nature always in a reverse direction, — the Lord assures that "no step on this path is in vain, no devotee of Mine goes to perdition". Even if the journey is not completed in this life, he will be placed in a holy family of Yogis, where what has been achieved this time will mark the starting point of the further journey. He says, "No devotee of Mine will perish, *na hi kalyānakrit kaschit durgatim tāta gachhati*. And this supreme assurance opens the gate, as it were, to the experience of love, devotion culminating in love, leading to surrender and an absolute trust in the Divine.

25. Gist of Karmayoga

In the last chapter of the first series of his Essays, Sri Aurobindo gives the gist of Karma yoga. The initial problem that is posed in the first chapter is a conflict, conflict of Dharma in a situation in which Arjuna is called upon to slay his elders, his teachers and a good chunk of humanity. Arjuna shudders at the prospect of sin that he is about to commit. Side by side he has to listen to the call of the society, which demands from a Kshatriya that he slay the hosts of evil and unrighteousness that are threatening the well-being of the society. So there is confusion in the mind of Arjuna whether he is to follow the dictates of his personal conscience or listen to the voice of the society. Normally this question would be resolved according to the prevailing ideals of the time either exclusively or in combination. And that is what Arjuna is told in the first instance; he has to slay because that is the demand of his class and also the requirement of the society. And even from a personal point of view his is a very superficial reaction because according to the high philosophy of the age, nobody slays and nobody is killed.

Once having given the highest guidance possible under the existing conditions, Lord Krishna takes him up to an elevated status because no problem can be really solved on the plane on which it occurs. Wherever these questions arise we will see that we cannot solve the problem on the level on which the two positions come to a conflict. You

have to rise higher; from a higher status you can see the truth more clearly and come to the right decision. So the Gita points out what is the duty, the duty not only of Arjuna but of everyone who is involved in the struggle of life, faces the problem of life and that is to rise above the natural being, and function according to the truth of the real inner being. We function, we act according to the drive of our nature. We are involved in Nature and as long as we continue to do that we cannot solve the problem. We have to rise above our natural being into the truth of our real being and live out of it. This upward transference of our centre of being leads to a considerable transformation of our existence. It brings about a change in the spirit and motive of actions.

Now, how do we set about doing it, rising above our nature, setting ourselves in the truth of our being and acting from that higher status? It is contrary to the teaching of the Vedanta. It is to convert works themselves, works that fall to one's lot in life, into a means of spiritual growth. And once having attained spiritual status, to continue to do works as an instrument of the Divine Will — for leading the peoples. A very important point is that by doing works with the right motivation, in the right spirit, the soul develops itself. This is a special contribution of Sri Aurobindo's perception that the soul is not divorced from Nature. When the natural activity is rightly carried on, the soul draws certain elements for its growth and develops itself. Our present life is not the whole of our real existence. We live very much on the surface. What we call our self is the ego-self involved in Nature. There is a hidden Self behind our surface self. And what we call Nature is a partial dynamic truth of this inner Self. Nature

is not alien to the Self but rightly looked at, it reveals itself as a result of the Self, will of the Self.

The Gita does not accept the standpoint of the Vedanta that Nature, Nature's activities are only an appearance, only a part of Maya. The Gita insists on investing activity, works, with their true significance; that as long as we do works in ignorance, it does not help us in spiritual progress, is another matter. But the door is open to those who aspire, to those who know to lift the centre of existence either inward towards the hidden Self or above the mind into the truth of our real being, and from there look at Nature a little detached, a little as a witness and then find that what we call action of Nature is only a play of the gunas, the modes, through the instruments of Nature.

There are the objects of senses and our senses grasp them and report. The mind rushes and appropriates those objects to itself, and in this rushing of the mind, the ego plays a great part. The ego wants to possess and appropriate to itself what does not belong to it. So what starts at the level of the senses is appropriated by the mind led by the ego and then comes the action of reason.

Reason analyses what is what and if it is enlightened, if it is developed enough, it points out that the Self is different, that these are graspings of the senses which are transient. Reason also points out that we normally lead two lives, one what is natural to us involved in Nature and another is a greater and spiritual living exceeding Nature. These are two possibilities always open to the human being. And it is the ego that is the clinching point in tying us to the lower movements of Nature. We think we exercise our will. Even in thinking that the will is ours, Nature's will communicates itself to us and we feel it is we who are deciding.

The modes of Nature, the sattva, rajas, tamas, act according to which guna is preponderant at a particular stage. If it is the tamas that is preponderant, one is content to live as things come and go without making any effort to rise above to change. If it is the rajas, the dynamic quality that is ruling, then there is always the agitated drive to grasp things, to adventure, to appropriate things, never to be contented, always moving. If it is the sattva, there is an effort to balance between tamas and rajas, to evaluate things from a position of detachment and looking beyond the reason. There is an attempt. So, whichever mode is active, that determines the type of life.

Instead of being always involved in it, the Gita calls upon man to live inwardly, consciously, to watch, hold oneself in a witness position and become conscious that it is something else than a personal will, something else than even the ego that ultimately decides, that even Nature acts according to a higher Will, a Will that functions in the movement of Nature. And that is the inner self.

We spoke of Kshara, the mutable, in which all movements take place. Then there is the immutable in which is the impersonal Self, not involved in anything. And there a question arises: who is to take interest in action if once one realises that status? We lose interest in work and there is no question how we do works, works themselves become irrelevant. But the Gita points out that they do not. Actions continue because the immutable Self is not the highest. The immutable Self itself is a poise, a status of the Supreme, the Supreme being, the Master, the Lord of works, the Lord of Nature. Taking his position in the immutable Impersonal stand, he projects his Will into the Kshara, into the mutable. There is a continuity of

consciousness, continuity of life between the mutable, the immutable and the transcendent. Simply because you have arrived at the immutable Self, actions do not become irrelevant. You become conscious that Nature herself acts as a sacrifice, as an offering to the Lord of Nature. And as an individual one is an instrument for the execution of this higher Will, the Supreme Will individuated through the immutable Self in each person, because the immutable Self is not beyond. It is also there in each individual. The frontal personality may be involved in Nature but behind the frontal personality is the Self, uninvolved, immutable. And that is what forms the basis of the oneness of all individuals. The division, the sense of separativity is there as long as one is involved in the movements of external Nature. But once one withdraws in some central part into the immutable Self and watches, Nature reveals herself to be only a Self-power, a power of the Supreme. The Supreme takes the status of the impersonal, immutable Self and from there communicates himself into the Universe, into each separate individual and acts.

So, for the person who has realised the transcendent or opened himself or linked himself to the Supreme, there is no question whether works are relevant. Works are not binding because he is not the doer. He has prepared himself through purification, concentration, consecration, through repeated inward transference to a state where his sense of doership, his personal sense is gone. His ego is dissolved. His individuality becomes part of the universal. And what acts is the Will of the Supreme, the Divine Will acting through his self, through his nature. And actions continue because they are to serve the purpose of the manifestation of the truth of the Supreme. The Self being self-existent,

always exudes a peace and stillness. And once one withdraws from the mutability of the movement and accustoms oneself to the state of peace, naturalises the state of stillness, one is once more driven but acts as a conscious instrument of the higher Will. The ego dissolves, the mind falls in stillness and one becomes one with all beings.

The one difficulty for the philosophical mind is, how do you place the tranquil Self and the action of Nature? The difficulty is resolved if we see that Nature herself is a projection, is power of the Self. The Will that dynamises Nature is the Will of the Supreme Purusha. The Gita makes it very clear that the Supreme is greater than the immutable Self, even as the immutable Self is greater than the mutable Self. He is the Master of Works and reveals Himself to the awakened man in the works of Nature. The seeker utilises works in order to grow into the poise of the Supreme.

And what exactly is the relation of the individual Soul with the Supreme Being? Is a relation possible at all? There has been enough preparation of knowledge; of works, how do you link yourself to the Supreme? The Gita points out that it is through devotion, through Bhakti, love, that the linkage is formed. Knowledge gives you a status in the impersonal, immutable Self; actions prepare you for the transition from the mutable into the immutable; but it is love, devotion, self-giving that cuts through all the mazes of Nature and forms a direct link, what they call in modern language the hotline with the Supreme. To develop this theme of love and self-surrender to the Supreme and the possibility of establishing relation with Him, functioning in his status is the subject matter for the next block of six chapters. The third block relates to philosophical distinc-

tions of the two Natures, the lower Nature and the higher Nature, the three Gunas, the possibility of manifestation of the Supreme in Nature and allied questions. Sri Aurobindo treats the Gita as consisting of three blocks one leading to another. The first one that we have studied so far deals with action and knowledge, karma and *jnāna.* The next one that we are going to study deals with *bhakti*, Love, which really gives life to activity, which moistens, gives the rasa of life to what could otherwise be a philosophical and a dry knowledge. And the third gives clarity to our understanding of the field of Nature, the two Natures, in what way the Soul comes to be associated with Nature and the modes of Nature, how the modes have their play at every level of life, whatever the field, they enter. And last comes the Supreme Secret: when there is a conflict, conflict of ideals, conflict of Dharmas, confusion of values, what is the way out? And that is the Supreme Secret of surrender to the Lord. Note that surrender is not a passive concept but something dynamic, which needs working upon it, not a state of passivity; a dynamic and an active effort is called for to build up the state of surrender. These are some of the themes that we will be studying in the further portions of the *Essays on the Gita*.

26. The Two Natures

We spoke of three blocks for convenience of study of the Gita. The first block consisting of six chapters provides a kind of preliminary basis of knowledge and practice. It gives a synthesis of the way of Works and of Knowledge. The next six chapters, seventh to the twelfth, which we are studying now, deal with the nature of the Divine Being. We arrive at the synthesis of Knowledge and Devotion. There is, in the course of the discussion, the vision of the *virāt purusha*, the world Purusha giving a dynamic turn relating knowledge of the Divine Being to works and to life. And the third block, chapters thirteen to eighteen deal with the distinction between the Purusha and the Prakriti.

We have, indeed, touched upon the subject but now it is in very concise and clear terms; Purusha versus Prakriti, the Nature of the Gunas, the three modes of which Prakriti is constituted and the necessity of their transcendence. And now it is possible from a transcendent poise to do desireless works based upon knowledge and inspired by love, love of the Supreme. All this culminates in the note of self-surrender to the Master of the Existence. This is a kind of a bird's eye-view of the main topics dealt with in the Gita and now we enter into a discussion of very concise statements. They are more or less intellectual statements of spiritual and supra-cosmic truths.

There is first the Self, the immutable, the impersonal Self versus the individual being in Nature, what we call the

self. The self is normally the ego-self involved in the play of the Gunas. And as long as this individual being is involved in the play of the Gunas there is no solution. The solution is outside the range of the Gunas for which you have to take your poise in the immutable Self.

We saw in our discussion that once you reach this Self, which is impersonal, aloof, immutable, there is first the feeling of inactivity. Once you reach there you are not prone to activity. The question arises: does activity stop once you reach the immutable Self? From all normal experience it should, but the Gita brings in here the concept of Iswhara and a higher Nature. Ishwara is the transcendent being and the higher Nature is distinct from the lower Nature. If the lower Nature is Prakriti, the higher Nature is Shakti, which is Para Shakti. Now what is the linkage between these three states, the individual being involved in the lower Nature, Gunas, the immutable Self where there is no appearance of activity and the status of the Ishwara and the Para Shakti? Sri Aurobindo points out that Bhakti, devotion, is the link. And it is on the basis of this identification, devotion, that you begin to know the Supreme Being in all principles of his Existence; not only know him in himself but also in all the principles of his Existence. This is called the unifying Knowledge. It combines the essential knowledge of Brahman, essential knowledge knowledge of the Supreme, it is Jnana. A comprehensive knowledge of all this Cosmos, of this manifestation is Vijnana. Vijnana is wide knowledge, just Jnana is essential knowledge. Both of them are necessary to get a complete grasp of the problem of existence.

Then arises the question of the distinction between two Natures, the phenomenal Nature in which we are involved

and the spiritual Nature. Now the spiritual Nature is not something totally divorced from phenomenal Nature. Spiritual Nature is behind the phenomenal Nature supporting it, informing it, leading it. And it not only stands behind supporting the phenomenal Nature and the movements in phenomenal Nature but it also becomes the Jiva to uphold the universe.

Jiva has got many connotations. Jiva does not mean just a living being. In the philosophical parlance, in the context of the Gita, Jiva is an individualised projection of the higher Nature of God. And this projection in each form, not only human beings, every form, being a derivative of the Divine Nature, *mamaivamsah*, all being derived from one Nature, there is a certain unity, what we call the multiple soul in creation. This Jiva, which is an individualised being projected by the higher Nature, is what we loosely call the soul, the inner self. And because it is one with the Jivas of other Jivas, we realise the unity of creation at that level.

The Sankhya with which the Gita starts posits Purusha separate from Prakriti, Prakriti with its number of elements in which the Purusha is involved or appears to be involved; the Gita extends its significance to the Vedantic context because it speaks of one Purusha; the Sankhya speaks of many Purushas. The Nature of the Spirit is Para Prakriti and the lower Nature is its derivation and dark shadow. When the lower Nature is in truth, not something totally different from the spiritual Nature, it is higher Nature. It is actually the higher Nature working in a limited manner subjecting itself to the conditions of ignorance and falsehood and appearing to be a phenomenal Nature. The phenomenal Nature cannot survive, cannot work without the support of the higher Nature.

The higher Nature is in the Supreme as Power, the Supreme in Power or as Power. And the Supreme Purusha is this Being, Consciousness. When the consciousness aspect is emphasised we speak of the Purusha, when the Power aspect is spoken of we speak of Prakriti, Shakti, Nature. One important point to be noted is that this Supreme Power, Supreme Prakriti is not merely an immanent presence. We have noted that the Divine Spirit is immanent, it in-dwells every form, every movement. Now merely to say it is immanent does not bring in the implication of activity, it can be a passive presence. But it is not a passive presence, it is an integral conscious Power of the Supreme, *Chit Shakti*, which is active. It is behind the Self and the Cosmos. When it is poised in the immutable Self it is said to be *Nivritti*, ceasing from activity; but when it comes into the mutable Self, it comes into action, *Pravritti*. And this higher Nature becomes in each person, in each being his Svabhava. Svabhava is the self-law. In each this higher Nature of God presents itself as the law of being suited to the line of evolution of that being. That is why they speak that each one has to follow one's Svabhava. Svabhava is the natural temperament, not the temperament of the hereditary, environmental or cultural back-ground but the mould in which the soul develops. That is the Svabhava. To act according to the Svabhava which is the higher Nature in action is called Dharma. The play of the Gunas is only a derivative play. The real truth is the spiritual oneness.

Suffice it to say that Para Prakriti is the originating Shakti. And Para Prakriti and Purushottama are identical. In the thought of the Gita the Purushottama and his Power are not different, not separate, they are identical.

We have noted that Jiva is the individual spiritual existence to provide a spiritual basis. Jiva is something that the higher Prakriti has become. But a Jiva does not exhaust the higher Nature. It is in the higher Nature. It is a product of the higher Nature.

It is to be noted that the relation of the Divine Bhava, the divine state of Being to the Svabhava of the individual and the relation of the Svabhava to the superficial Bhava, the real Bhava is different from the Bhava with which we are familiar as a play of the ego and desire, the desire-self. The Bhava or the Svabhava of the desire-self is different from the Svabhava of the inner Self. So there is the inner Self, the superficial Self and the Divine Self, the transcendent Self. All these three are linked by the higher Nature, the Para Prakriti.

And the presence of the Divine Power, we recognise, as essential qualities, for instance, light in the Sun, manhood in the man, intelligence in the intelligent being; these are all activities, movements of the Divine Power. This essential quality of the Divine Power is different from the phenomenal derivatives of the lower Nature. The Gita refers first to the strength of the strong which is the Divine Power, then it speaks of the strength of the strong devoid of desire, that is higher Nature. When it is involved in Nature, naturally it is limited, it loses its character and becomes a binding force. He governs from his lower Nature and succumbs to it. The Gita takes care to point out that desire has two meanings, desire when it is driven by ego, when it is a play of the Gunas is something binding, is a work of the Maya, the lower Nature. But when the Gita proclaims that "I am desire", which is not in conflict with Dharma, that is the Will, the Divine Will to sport

in delight, to draw the delight of existence, to enjoy the Ananda of existence, — that is the Divine Desire. And this is at the root of the whole creation.

Maya is a deliberate formation of this higher Nature in acting under the dominion of the three Gunas. Even this Maya, Sri Aurobindo points out, is not really a power of illusion, it creates false images, it creates false concepts, it colours every thing with ego and desire. It acts as a net. But it has no independent existence. Maya is a self-projection of the higher Nature.

In discussing this Sri Aurobindo makes an observation that it is as a result of this Magic play that we normally think that the soul is in the body. But the truth is that the body is in the soul. The spirit is not in the body. They speak of thumb-sized Purusha in the immensity of matter, in the immensity of inconscience, but these are themselves projections of the spirit. And, he points out the affirmation of the Lord, "I am in these things, these things are in me, but I am not exhausted by these things." He is there in principle but those things in which he is in principle do not exhaust him. They live in him. He does not live by them. This is the distinction that the Lord, the Supreme, holds all creatures but he does not live by them. He is not contained in them but he contains them. There is a line in Savitri, "The One by whom all live, who lives by none".

27. The Synthesis of Devotion and Knowledge

The Gita is not primarily a metaphysical treatise. Still it has given us a frame of metaphysics with a view to enable spiritualisation of life. Normally metaphysics is an intellectual pastime to clarify the mind's conceptions and develop the intellect. But the metaphysics of the Gita is life-oriented. It shows the way to convert life activity into means for transition from the mortal way of life, ignorance, ego, to something higher, a divine life based upon eternal truths.

We have so far three concepts. First is the transcendent, the *Purushottama*, the Supreme Lord, the Supreme Reality. In the course of manifestation he takes the poise of the immutable Self, a Self that is eternal, unchanging, impersonal. That is where the power of the *Purushottama* is at rest. It is in a status of quietude which is known as Nivritti. Lower down in the scale of manifestation this Power, the Supreme Power, which is the nature of the *Purushottama*, which organises itself as the Self, immutable at the impersonal level, takes birth as the Jiva. Jiva is the multiple Soul, same in Nature, an eternal portion of the Supreme, of God, but inhabiting many forms, many creatures, the multiple Soul. Now this multiple Soul is really a self-projection of the *Parā Shakti*, the Supreme Nature in its active status. If it was Nivritti in the impersonal Self, here in the organisation of the multiple Soul, it is in the

Pravritti movement. As we said, Para Prakriti is the Nature of the Purushottama. The same Nature which poises itself as the impersonal Self where the Divine Nature is in Nivritti, becomes the Jiva for Pravritti. And this Nature, Divine Nature, takes the form of svabhava of the Jiva. The Jiva represents the Purusha aspect but the Divine Nature which is Para Prakriti takes the form of svabhava. Svabhava is the inherent nature of each Jiva. Each Jiva has its own temperament, its own nature.

At the deepest level, what is called the essential status is the svabhava, not what we normally call svabhava, which is a product of habits, environments, conglomeration of various contacts and impacts from the universe. Svabhava is something with which the Soul comes to birth. As we noted elsewhere, it is this svabhava, the inherent nature of the Jiva, that determines the law of its manifestation, the law on which its career is based, its svadharma. So the svadharma of each one depends upon the svabhava of the Soul. The svadharma of an artist, for instance, will be different from the svadharma of a mathematician. A mathematician will be analytical, will go into small details, precicion, calculation. The svabhava of a mathematician is focussed in that direction. But an artist takes an overall view, more universal, more in tune with Nature; that is the svabhava. His svadharma is, naturally, to regard the priority of the inner truths and not the external facts. At any rate, the Indian artist has always looked within and probed beneath the surfaces for manifesting whatever truth came into his ken.

The lower Prakriti consists of Gunas, the modes, and its overall working is in the field of ignorance. The individual who functions in ignorance as a subject of lower Prakriti is

the ego-individual, and not the true, spiritual individual. 99% of us act as ego-individuals, slaves of external Nature. If we want to get over this slavery to lower Nature, to desire and ego, the discipline that the Gita advocates is to control the children of rajas, that is, desire, ego, anger and similar movements. It is they that hold one in the slavery to lower Nature. So before any kind of liberation becomes possible one has to subjugate one's rajasic nature which keeps one always moving in the grooves of desire and ego and the brood of desire like anger, resentment, attachment. It is only when the rajasic movements are controlled and in their place the sattvic mode, the mode of balance, the mode of harmony is replaced that one emerges from the murk of rajas and arrives at a status of certain self-control, quietude and balance.

But that is not the end; Sri Aurobindo points out that to arrive at a stage of sattva is indispensable in order to go beyond it. To stay in a kind of sattvic perfection is to stay in a golden cage but a cage all the same. So one has to exceed even the sattvic status by getting over the rule of dualities, pain and pleasure, good and bad. Even for a sattvic man these dualities exist. He may not react vehemently as a rajasic person does but he is aware of them, he welcomes pleasant contacts, he avoids the unpleasant and to that extent he is subject to the rule of dualities. A person who wishes to cross the zone of the sattva has to go beyond the dualities and arrive at a certain impersonal state where he is not disturbed by the impacts of the world in the form of dualities. One is not excited by the drive of ego and desire but stays in the poise of the Self, which is impersonal, immutable and eternal.

Even this, exceeding the sattvic belt, fixing oneself in the status of the impersonal Self is also a stage because

normally when one is fixed in the status of the impersonal Self, there is a disinclination to exert oneself, to engage oneself in activity of any kind, even in activities which are called good ones, humanitarian ones,there is a detachment and a preference to inaction. But that is not the purpose of Nature. So once having arrived at the impersonal Self, getting free from the hold of the lower Prakriti, one proceeds to relate oneself to the still higher Purushottama, to the higher transcendent Being of which both the impersonal Self and the active Self involved in Nature, are two complementary parts. At our level in ignorance, the lower Prakriti and the higher one, the lower status of action and the higher status of inaction look like contraries. But when one arrives at the state of Purushottama, they are seen to be two faces, looking at each other but belonging to the same Reality.

So one has to arrive at the *Purushottama*. We have noted that the only way to escape from the drive of rajasic desire is to recourse to sattva; the ego, the drive of desire, pushes one into evil. Sattva is the only remedy. One cannot hope to become suddenly spiritual when one is in the state of rajas, one has to substitute rajas by sattva. And this cultivation of the sattvic temperament and nature is called ethical culture. Ethics is necessary, ethics is an indispensable stage but one has to go even beyond ethics.

It is at this stage that the synthesis that has been effected between Knowledge and Works needs to be reinforced, enlivened by devotion; as long as you are in the belt of the impersonal Self, there is no question of emotion because it is an impersonal Reality; you cannot pray to it, you cannot love it, you can only breathe its equality and serenity. But once the *Purushottama*, the Lord of the

Being, the Master of the Being is related to, there comes the need to worship, to adore, to relate yourself at a certain emotional level and that is where Bhakti enters.

This element of Bhakti is not a sudden arrival. The Gita takes care that even when you are engaged or involved in the common round of activity, you start by offering your works as a sacrifice, not doing for yourself but consecrating it, dedicating it to the Divine. That is where the element of self-surrender starts. It reaches its culmination when you arrive at the stage of having personal relation with the Lord.

Thus there are three movements of release. First is to escape from the dualities by shedding the vital ego, passion, desire and increase of sattvic elements. The second is to rise into the impersonal Self by cultivating equality, quietude and a certain emphasis on transcendence, not suppression but getting beyond the lower elements. And once you arrive at the frontiers of the realm of the *Purushottama* there is the efflorescence of devotion. What was begun with sacrifice develops into adoration, into worship. And what is special about the Gita's prescription of Bhakti is that you offer your Bhakti, your love, your homage, the best in yourself not only to the Lord above, the Master of your being in his highest status but also to him in the world.

Again and again Sri Aurobindo calls attention to the phrase *samagram mām*, my integral being, not the transcendent being alone but the transcendent being as organised, as manifest in the universe. So you pour your devotion not only up there but here around, and in doing that, you arrive at a certain unity with the world, with the other Jivas, with the higher Nature manifest as multiple Jivas.

You surrender not only to the all-originating Godhead but also to the Godhead manifest and leading the world. That is where the vision widens, not only the knowledge but even the feeling, to embrace the universe.

A question may arise, whether after the Knowledge is fulfilled, when one knows the truth of things, is it possible to return to action, return to devotion? Devotion ultimately means two, one who worships, one who offers devotion and he who accepts. But this knowledge shows the oneness of everything. So where is the adorer and where is the adored? That is the Vedantic question. So, is it not a relapse to go back to activity, to indulge in Bhakti? Sri Aurobindo points out that this is so only if the empire of the lower Prakriti has nothing to do with the higher Prakriti. It is not so. It is the higher Prakriti that is functioning in the guise of the lower Prakriti. It is the higher Nature that leads through experience of the lower Nature in order to conduce to the growth of the Jiva. So even there, behind all Nature's activities, apparently mechanical, apparently meaningless, there is the hand of God. And activity does not cease, because you do activity as worship, as sacrifice to the Lord in humanity, to the Lord manifest in the world. It is a kind of a continuation, a manifestation of the relation established at the level of love with the Lord of Being.

And even at the lower level, Bhakti has its own importance. The Gita is very emphatic that in any form Bhakti is relevant. The Lord recognises four kinds of devotees: Those in distress, who are suffering, the *ārta*; those who approach God for betterment, economic betterment, betterment of the circumstances of life, the *arthārthi*; then there are those who seek to know God, *jijnāsu*; and the last is *jnāni*,

the knower who loves God because he knows God. Sri Aurobindo gives an interesting correlation. He says the Bhakti of the Arta can be described as vital-emotional. But of him who seeks betterment of life it is practical and dynamic. And of him who searches for the knowledge it is reasoning in the intellect. And the fourth is the working of intuition, there is an intuitive grasp that the Lord is everywhere, the being goes and prostrates itself to the all-pervading Lord. So we are assured that all these states are regarded by the Divine, they are in fact preparatory steps. One cannot jump to Jnana with Bhakti at one stroke. One passes through these various stages. One worships God, various Gods who respond to human approach and we are assured that even then, it is he, the Supreme who responds through the forms of the Gods or deities that man erects for his continuing relation. Of those who worship the lesser gods, the desires are satisfied but through those gods their appeal goes to the Supreme. So it is not as if they are imaginations, there is truth in the gods, there is truth in prayer. The Lord accepts offering in whatever way it is offered. And he says whatever your motive of devotion, whatever your way of approach, what gives validity to the approach is faith. Faith is indispensable and in each case he strengthens the faith by experience, by giving what the person wants. In whatever way faith is important. Faith receives reinforcement from the Supreme.

In this manner, step by step, the devotee advances, his devotion becomes one with knowledge. As Sri Aurobindo puts in the *Synthesis*, the crown of love is knowledge and the culmination of knowledge is love. When you know that he is all-pervading, he is the Master of your being, it is he who runs your life, your being flows in love. And love itself

which is the result and the fruit of identification with the Lord, self-surrender, makes you know the intrinsic nature of the Lord. You are identified at the core and you know the Reality. So, the crown of love is knowledge.

This is where we arrive at the synthesis of love,knowledge and works. Each approach is valid, each approach should lead to the others. Each should take care that it is not exclusive and does not shut up the Jiva in its own prison.

28. The Supreme Person

We have seen so far that the way for a spiritual seeker is to move upward, upward from his human level of consciousness towards the divine consciousness. One special point to be noted in the Gita's teaching is that one moves upward toward higher and higher regions of the Spirit but without exclusion of Cosmic Nature. Traditionally all paths imply that you minimise your participation in the world and increase your pre-occupation with the higher pursuits exclusively but the Gita insists that the Cosmic Nature should be part of this fulfilment.

For this transition from the human to the divine, from the physical to the entirely spiritual, the link lies in the soul, the soul which is, in a sense, a ray of the Supreme Soul, *mamaiva amshah*, my little portion. It is because this soul is essentially a portion of the Supreme, a ray of the Supreme, that it is possible to forge a link with the higher Self, the Supreme Soul. And also because of the double nature of the soul: one is the original intrinsic Nature which is spiritual because the soul essentially is a part of the Supreme; though the original Nature is spiritual the Nature in which it is involved here on earth in the movements of ego and desire, is a derived nature. But the lower Nature is not all. Behind it, supporting it in a way, there is the higher Nature. This makes it possible for a natural transition from the lower to the higher, to become or re-become a portion of the Godhead because originally

when the soul sets out on its career, it is a direct portion of the Godhead. After its adventure and evolutionary progression, it goes back and re-becomes a richer portion of the God-head. In most of the spiritual lines of discipline there is *nirodha, chittavritti nirodha*, which applies to all Nature; you suppress Nature, you banish Nature, you relegate Nature to the externals. The more you progress, the more you annul, cancel the activities of Nature. But in the path presented by the Gita there is a self-fulfilment; the lower Nature, the usual Nature, Prakriti, is fulfilled in its diviner Nature, Para Prakriti. It is not cancelled but it is lifted up and transmuted into higher Nature. This is a special characteristic of the Gita way, a depārture from the contemporary thought which does not permit Nature as it exists to form part of spiritual life.

Another point to be noted at this stage is that when we speak of the Supreme, there is the beginning of Bhakti. We have noted that as long as your goal is the Brahman, the immutable Brahman, impersonal, there is no question of emotion, no question of devotion. But once you have the vision of the Supreme, the Purushottama, the relationship develops and it starts with Bhakti, devotion. To put it in another way, the first serious and capital experience that one has when one starts detaching oneself from involvement in external Nature, is the experience of the calm, the silence of the impersonal, the immutable Self. Once you arrive there, there is a natural devaluation of activity, activity in the world; under whatever name, there is a natural disinclination to leave this poise of an impersonal aloofness. But this is only the first stage, the first experience. The second vision is of a Divine Being. An impersonal existence is not the ultimate, it is an intermediate step leading

to an infinite Divine Being. And there begins a personal relation, a beginning of devotion which culminates in love at a later stage.

This transition from the outer self to the impersonal Self and from the impersonal Self to the Divine Being, the *Purushottama*, proceeds through three movements. There is an integral self-finding through works founded in our spiritual nature. Works founded on our egoistic nature driven by desire have a binding effect. But if we can base our activities on our inner and our spiritual nature, we gradually find ourselves that we are not doers, it is Nature that is the doer. And we are not personally responsible for whatever actions are done through us. We begin to find our true Self through works. The next step is — a simultaneous movement — self-becoming through knowledge of the Divine Being. Side by side with works, there is a growing knowledge, knowledge dawning from within or knowledge acquired from study by which we come to know the true nature of the Divine Being and in knowing it we start becoming it because spiritual knowledge is not something intellectual which remains on the top shelf of the being but a knowledge which as it founds itself, as it establishes itself, becomes part of our nature. It slowly changes the texture of our being into its mould. That is what is meant by self-becoming through knowledge of the Divine Being.

And the third, self-giving to the Master and the Inhabitant. The Divine, Supreme Being is not only the Lord, Master, but he is also the Inhabitant in each form, in each body. He is not there alone on the transcendent heights but also here in-dwelling each creature, each form. And once one awakes to this presence, this existence, there is a movement of self-giving. So the triple movement is self-

giving through works, self-becoming through knowledge, self-giving through love. And to make this self-giving complete and not just a partial movement, an integral knowledge is indispensable, integral knowledge of the Supreme, not only in himself but in the various principles and processes of his Becoming here in this manifestation, because he is All. An integral knowledge means knowledge of the manifestation included. Knowledge of the Purushottama includes knowledge of Brahman, who is the manifesting ground for this earth life.

Then the Gita enunciates a few essential truths. First is Brahman, *tad brahma*. Brahman is the ground, the basis of all this creation; when he is manifest, he is realisable as the immutable Self-existence. Next is Adhyatma, that is the Svabhava. Svabhava in this context means the spiritual way of the soul as Supreme Nature. Supreme Nature is a power of the Supreme Being. That Supreme Nature decides which part of its Truth is to be manifested by each Jiva. And this imperative with which each Jiva is loaded is the real svabhava of each person. That is called the Adhyatma. Then comes Adhibhuta, the mutable becoming, changing being. Adhidaiva is the Soul in Nature, the subjective. If Adhibhuta is the objective side of existence, Adhidaiva is the subjective powers; we call them by the names of the gods and actually they are soul-powers in Nature. Next is Adhiyajna, that is the Lord of Works and sacrifice. He is there everywhere; wherever there is the individual these five truths are simultaneously present: Brahman as the immutable self-existence; Adhyatma as the Svabhava of each creature; Adhibhuta is the mutable becoming of the forms; Adhidaiva is the Soul in Nature, the soul side, thus the material side, the physical expressive side and the soul

side; and the Adhiyajna, the Master of the Being. Whether we are aware of it or not, the Master of the being is present in us, accepting what Nature offers to him through us; we may not be conscious but whether we participate consciously or not, Nature does the works through us and the Purusha accepts her work as sacrifice. This is a continual operation.

Now a question arises: the immutable Brahman supports this mutable becoming but this Brahman does not create. Then who creates? It is Para Prakriti, the higher Nature ordains the Svabhava of each form and that is how things originate. So the origin of this creation and the people inhabiting this world and the forms is there in the Supreme Being. The immutable Brahman is a poise for stepping forth of the Supreme Being. Purushottama supports the action of the higher Prakriti in each being. And the higher Prakriti stands behind and supports the lower Prakriti through all confusions, through all errors, through all deviations; otherwise this lower Prakriti could not survive even for a moment. We have noted that the Svabhava, the law of manifestation is the inherent truth and principle of Self in each form; this is a beautiful definition of what is Svabhava: the inherent truth and principle of Self in each Jiva.

And of the higher Nature which expresses itself as Prakriti here, the energy of that Prakriti is called Karma. In other words Karma is the machinery through which the Prakriti does its works. The soul in Nature is the Kshara Purusha; the soul in Brahman is the Akshara Purusha. And above both is the Purushottama who possesses the calm of the immutable existence and at the same time enjoys the mutable action of the Prakriti. So, in the consciousness of the Supreme Purusha both the impersonal

and the immutable Brahman and the active Prakriti in man are co-existent. They are not one after another but simultaneous.

Then there is another important question. In the Gita it is mentioned that if at the time of death whoever fixes his mind upon the Divine goes to him without fail. This has led to many superstitious notions in different religions. In the Hindu religion we say that if you die in Kashi all your sins are washed away and you go to Moksha. In the Christian religion the priest administering the water and repeating the name of the Lord absolves the person from all the sins he has done. These are certain extreme beliefs. But actually what the Gita says is very profound. It points out that our nature carries out whatever our mind, our soul strongly wills. The factor that prevails upon Nature is within us. As we think, as we feel, so is our life. Now to be able to truly remember the Divine and yoke ourselves to the Divine in our last moments, it is absolutely necessary that that attitude, that disposition must have been established in our daily life. All the while, in all ways, we must have learnt to identify ourselves with the Divine and live our life in the Divine. In all ways, it says; that means at all levels and at all times our life must flow towards the Divine. In other words, we must have no life separate from the Divine. It is only if our life is so textured, that in the last moments all the consciousness gathers in this direction and automatically it reaches its destination in the Supreme. Otherwise it is a very superficial movement which does not make any difference to the person. It is the predominant motive, predominant mode of living that determines the future. What I am, what I have been all long in my life, that is going to determine my next life, or what is to

happen after I leave the body. If the Divine is the centre, if it is the Divine who governs all my life-movements, it continues and it continues more effectively. Sri Aurobindo points out that in the higher planes it is more true that the Soul-will becomes more effective in outer Nature. Even when we do yoga, as we begin to live in the higher planes our inner will becomes more effective. And once we leave the body, naturally that prevails. It is not that whatever we may do in life, if only we remember Rama or Krishna at the end, we go to heaven. It is a very simplistic belief. The Gita is very clear that one has to be *manmanā, madbhaktah*; only then that movement gathers by itself without one's willing and forges the path to go to the Supreme.

Then Sri Aurobindo incidentally refers to the observation by the Gita of the particular period when one should leave the body: bright-half, the dark-half, the day, the night, the northern solstice and the southern solstice. He observes that this must have come from some mystic practices of the ancients. He adds a footnote that yogic experience confirms that in this constant battle between the forces of the Divine, forces of Light, and the the forces of Darkness that goes on in the individual as also in the world, the forces of light gain an upper hand during the physical day. That is, there is a close correspondence between the psychological states and the physical states. So during the day when there is a physical light, the psychological forces of light gain the upper hand. And it is in the dark at night that the adverse forces gain. And he adds this will continue till the final victory is won.

That is at the base of our common belief that illnesses get more serious at night. Crisis of many kinds develop during night. If once the night is passed we say there is a

fresh hope. So night is a period when Nature gives an opening to the darker forces. Day is the period when Nature helps through the forces of light. That is why there is a strong custom in many houses not to remove all lights at night. Somewhere in the house they keep a lamp burning, maybe in the prayer room or wherever. Some light burning in the house discourages the forces of darkness from getting free entry. There is a strong custom of burning some lamp in the room where a person has departed. That has occult significance. The person's spirit tends to come back and rest in the atmosphere where it had lived during its physical sojourn. If you keep a light there it helps it to guard itself from the various nefarious elements that are abroad.

29. Secret of Secrets

In this chapter, 'Secret of Secrets', Sri Aurobindo recapitulates the main arguments that have been advanced so long and brings the discussion to a point from where he begins an exposition of the supreme Secret.

First he states the problem. There are two ways of living. These ways are opposite of each other. One is our normal way of working in ignorance with the ego as the reference point: it is the drive of the ego, appropriation by the ego of the fruits of works and the assumption of the doership by the ego. The whole movement is in a round of ignorance with the result that activity forges of the bonds of karma.

An awakened man, when he wants to break the circle of slavery to Nature, slavery to activity, first detaches himself and observes that it is Nature that does the works and not he. Nature, constituted of three gunas, through the inter-play of the three modes, carries on the movement. He finds that he has been falsely attributing to himself the doership of the works. Even the fruits of works are appropriated by the ego. He witnesses, he watches and he finds that even his own nature is a kind of instrument of the universal Nature. This allows him a certain freedom.

The next step: once he detaches himself from works, he offers the fruits of works to the Master of the Being, to the Divine. That gives him a certain attitude of equality because he is not bothered whether there is a worldly success or failure; he does his best. Gradually as this posi-

tion of a witness, observance, non-identification with the movement of activity, stabilises itself, he feels the breath of the Impersonal Self, the Immutable Brahman. He becomes aware of something in him, behind the active personality which is unchanging, immutable. And this poise in the Self which is not at all involved in the movement of works, gives him a calm, a peace and a foundation in the spiritual path leading to the Eternal. He separates himself from the movement of time, and consequently loses interest in the work. He enters into a phase of quietism, he likes to be left alone, quiet, even when he realises that it is Nature who does the works. He lets the Nature do what it will but he does not take any initiative. This is the first conflict on which the Gita focusses its attention: liberation and activity. As long as you are engaged in activity of the normal kind, there cannot be liberation, and as long as you are shut up in your liberation, there cannot be activity.

So, what is the way out? The Gita shows the way. And that is, even the Impersonal Self to which you withdraw, in which you establish yourself, is realised to be only a gate to a larger peak, a transcendent Purusha, who is above both the Kshara, the mutable, and the Akshara, the immutable. God, Sri Aurobindo points out, is both personal and impersonal. As the impersonal, he gives the support and is the base for activity to go on. As the personal, he involves himself in the world-movement, also on individual basis, on an individual scale. Thus, the Divine Reality has three poises, one transcendent; second when it moves into manifestation providing foundation in the immutable and the impersonal Self; and then the personal, the active Self.

Now what about Nature? We have seen that Nature is tied up with the ego. How can you resume activity in

Nature once you are liberated? The Gita gives an explanation that Nature also has two statuses: the normal Prakriti, active Nature, involved in the movement of ego and desire, ignorance, and a higher Nature which is a direct power of the Supreme. In fact, the movement of the lower nature is also supported and becomes possible because of the support and the inherent presence of the higher Nature. And this higher Nature is a power of the Divine. It supports all activity whether you are aware of it or not. For a seeker who realises his identity with the Purushottama, the Supreme Self, participation in the world-movement is very natural because the Supreme Person himself is involved in every movement, in the existence of every form. And the human being, the human soul, being a portion of the Supreme Soul, also participates in the world-movement. This is the resolution of the problem of liberation and activity.

Next, when in the course of detachment from Nature, the ego-personality is taken up in the impersonality of the spiritual being, what happens to Nature? Nature also is taken up in the action of the Cosmic Nature, the Universal Nature, which is larger than my individual frame. And even this Cosmic Nature does not exist by itself. It exists only as a power of the Supreme Person. That is, it is through that Power at various levels that there is a divine participation in Nature. The Supreme Godhead dwells both in man and in Nature. He is the secret link between the individual and the universal. It is one Divine Consciousness that lodges itself in the individual frame as the soul that functions and as the Universal Soul in the Universal Nature. This points to a double condition of the divine birth of the Soul.

To take the divine birth the human soul has to fulfil two conditions. One is knowledge of the Immutable Self. We have to separate ourselves from our involvement in the mutable Self, normal, ego-driven, ego-centred life activity and attain to knowledge of the Immutable Self. Here by knowledge the Gita does not mean intellectual knowledge, knowledge got from scriptures or learned books but knowledge by identity, an identification in consciousness. That is the knowledge that becomes what it knows. Now knowledge of the Immutable Self is a spontaneous experience of the Immutable Self. And what is more important, through it there comes union with the timeless Godhead above. That is the first condition.

Second, it is not enough to realise union with the Godhead above. It is a must that we must learn to perceive, to feel and to identify ourselves with the Godhead behind all existences. This is a point which Sri Aurobindo emphasises again and again. He says that vertical spirituality has been achieved by many. Many have soared high in their consciousness and attained union with the immutable, impersonal reality and above with the Purushottama but the vision and the realisation of the divine Presence behind all existences is the horizontal spirituality that is still to be worked out. To arrive at that realisation is the 'Secret of Secrets'. That is not possible till we know the Supreme in his integrality, *samagram mām*, that is, not only in his essential nature, essential principle of transcendent nature but also of his immanent nature everywhere. Realising the immanent nature of the reality we attain identity, union, unity with all existences at the level of the Self. This is what is meant by knowledge of the Godhead behind all existences. When we do that we realise that Nature, even

lower Nature, offers all activities, all works to the Lord of the Being, to the Lord of Nature. The Lord of individual being is also the Lord of Universal Nature.

So whether we are aware of it or not in our superficial existence, every action that is done by the Nature through us and in us is automatically offered to the Lord. The point is it does not become our offering, it is Nature's offering. It is only at the point where we become conscious, identify ourselves and offer it, join in the offering, that it becomes a consecrated offering. And that is where, he says, works, knowledge, are joined by devotion. In offering ourselves, in offering our works, in offering our life to the Supreme Lord, the element of Bhakti develops. And it is that which gives justification to all works and to knowledge of every kind. Knowledge is awareness of the various principles of the Godhead as organised in the cosmic and individual existence, with the result that works of Nature and freedom of soul get unified in adoration. Bhakti turns into worship. External worship gradually takes an inner character, adoration; adoration is when you celebrate the Divine's presence everywhere wherever you see, wherever you look, the flow of the being is towards the Master of your being. And this adoration gradually, in the measure of your intensity, melts into love. Love is a causeless self-giving. There is no why. In that movement of self-giving to God there is no asking why, for what. It is a spontaneous flow of the being. This entire self-giving is love.

And that love, of course, has many gradations before we arrive at the pure quality of the selfless love, *ahaituki bhaktih*, causeless devotion. There are many levels to be crossed which Mother discusses in great detail in her talks to which we have drawn attention before. All this leads not

to the annulment of Nature but to fulfilment of Nature, not a denial of life but fulfilment. To arrive at that fulfilment by changing the status of our consciousness, — that is the Secret of Secrets.

One mistake that we should avoid in understanding this teaching is that it does not work successively. It is not that we will first complete our liberation from the mutable round of existence, then take our stand in the impersonal and after that we cross over into the transcendent. It does not happen that way. The human consciousness is so made that it is possible to have different states of consciousness at the same time. In the front, on the surface, you work in tune with the Kshara, with the mutable Nature, at a deeper level you are one with the Akshara, the Impersonal, and on the heights of your being, you are open and consecrated to the Supreme. So, it is possible to have simultaneously all these three poises of consciousness. When you start there may be emphasis or one-sided development of one poise or other. But gradually they fuse, there is a growing harmonisation. Unity is forged between the lower Nature and the higher, between the inner soul and the universal and the link between the cosmic Nature, cosmic activity and the Master of the being, who is also the Master of Nature.

This is the way that Arjuna is being prepared for the vision of the *viswarupa*, the Universal Purusha, the Universal Being, who combines in himself both the personal and the impersonal, the mutable and the immutable; the key is sacrifice, sacrifice to the Master of the being and through the Master of the being at the universal level to the Supreme Supra-cosmic Reality. In doing this, the Gita emphasises the necessity of faith, because our doubting

mind raises many questions, doubts experiences; it is necessary to have a central faith that there is a divine Reality within oneself, that the same divine Self is organised in the universe, and these two selves, the universal and the individual, are poises of a Supreme Self. And that Supreme Self, in its power, is the higher Nature, *parā prakriti*, which at a lower level functions as the *aparā prakriti*, the lower Nature, subject to the mutations of time and space and subjecting itself to the drive of desire and ego.

I must have faith that this is a truth and I have to realise it. Once I have an initial faith to start with, every experience confirms that faith. If the faith is wrong, wrongly placed, if the faith is defective, then the right experience knocks it out. But a genuine faith is always justified by spiritual experience. It is a matter of experience that the secret Godhead within each one Svabhava is not just temperament, it is the initial push from the Supreme for a particular line of manifestation. And each time we transit from the human level towards the Divine, there is the divine birth in us. There are many such births, not just one birth as there is not one dawn, but many dawns. And in dreams, in visions, usually this inner birth is signified by a child. You hold a child or you see a child in front of you or you feel a child around you. Now this child is always a registration, in the dream consciousness, of the phenomenon of a divine birth, of the soul's taking a new birth.

30. The Divine Truth and the Way

I believe we had spoken some time back about the various Theories of Existence. It is necessary, perhaps, to recall that to provide the necessary background for today's discussion of "The Divine Truth and the Way".

There is first the supra-cosmic theory, the approach that God is beyond this cosmos. He transcends our world. In its extreme position this theory borders on the extra--cosmic. The reality is there. The real value of life is not here. You have to withdraw from this and reach the Reality which transcends the creation.

Contrary to this is another approach which asserts that what we see, what we experience, is the truth. This world is the truth. All you know, all that you experience is here. Why do you need to imagine that there is something else? All the truth is here, all the reality is here. This is the Terrestrial View. Terrestrial: *terre* is earth, this earth-based creation is self-sufficient. Everything else is irrelevant. That is the second view.

The third view is, beyond this earth-life there are other worlds. There are worlds of Paradise, worlds of Hell, Vaikuntha, Goloka and so on. One goes to that world for which one qualifies by good deeds or otherwise while on earth. This is the Supra-Terrestrial View. The issue is in these higher worlds.

These are the different views which have been subject of constant debate. Sri Aurobindo takes an integral per-

spective. He points out that there is a truth in all of these, particularly the Terrestrial because earth has a meaning, earth-life has a significance. It is not an illusion. There is a meaning, a purpose in life. There is also a truth in the Supra-Terrestrial view because our life does not end with the earth-innings, it extends. Once the earthly life is terminated, you go to the other worlds, the world of life, the world of mind and so on. They are real and they do influence our world; there is a connection between those worlds and ours. There is a continuing inter-change between these worlds. They can influence what happens on earth. And, he observes, that from the earth also one can influence what happens there. This is a unique perception of his that an individual on earth, by force of will and concentration of consciousness, can effect changes there. He can invoke something to come here. The inter-change is both ways, from above to below and from below to above.

It is also true, he says, that there is the Supra-Cosmic Reality. This reality, while maintaining relation, is not involved in what goes on, in the way you and I are involved in the life on earth; it maintains a certain presiding status but it is not involved in the becoming.

Thus Sri Aurobindo synthesises all the three diverse positions and builds up his integral philosophy of life. Now with this background you would be able to appreciate better what is discussed in this Chapter: "The Divine Truth and the Way".

The supreme secret of life is the mystery of the transcendent Godhead because it is above the range of our experience. And to that transcendent Godhead there is a natural flow of adoration, flow of love and being. And that adoration, worship, is not just of the mind or of the heart

but of the whole nature, *samagram*, and self-surrender. This is the key. The adoration and the surrender have to be whole, not confined to a part of us. The Gita emphasises on an integral relationship, living in the Divine, loving in the Divine, losing oneself in the Divine, entire. And that is the secret even of the Integral Yoga. From this transcendent Godhead which is a self-existent being, a power of that being acts. Now when you say power of that being, note that the power is not different from the being, the being as power, the Sun as sunlight; the rays of the Sun are not different from the Sun, similarly when the Supreme Being wields its power it is the Being as power and that power takes its position, foundational position as the impersonal, the immutable Reality.

And next, srishti is released, releases itself in the Cosmos as the Universe. When they say as the universe, it means the universe, every part of it is God, is the Divine. This universal self-projection is not all. The Divine Reality, the transcendent Godhead lodges itself in each individual form, not only in the human body as the human ego is apt to believe; even in every form, every particle, every atom, there is a spark of this divinity. So we have the individual station, the cosmic station, the immutable Self and the transcendent. It is a movement, successive movement which we think in terms of time and space at our level. But there at the spiritual level, there is no time and space. It is a co-existence. The being and becoming are co-existent.

Sri Aurobindo makes repeated point that there the extension of being into becoming, of the one into the many is not spatial, not in terms of time, not in terms of space, but it is a spiritual extension, which means a self-arrangement in consciousness. So when we say, the Divine,

God is there everywhere, it is not that he is deposited as a particle but it is a matter of consciousness. When I am talking to you, I am speaking of a particular subject but for a while there is a noise and my mind goes there but I continue to talk. The fact is, I live on two different levels at that time. Psychologically or mentally I am somewhere but verbally I am here. It is a special characteristic of human being that he can live in different levels at the same time. I can go on doing something physical, I can go on feeling some emotion for you all who are here aspiring for the Divine, I can go on mentally weaving what I am going to say. At a deeper level, I can also participate in the movement of the soul upward to the divine inspiration. All those levels are possible at the same time. Staying in one place it is possible to do all these. This psychological fact of coincident experience is to be kept in mind.

The movement of manifestation, the movement of creation from the transcendent Godhead through its self-power is one. Now the journey of the human soul, — it is the same transcendent Godhead which has involved itself in its most concrete material form of an atom, — is in the reverse direction. It gathers experience at every level, affirms its reality at every level and goes back to the original transcendent Godhead. This is the return journey which we call Evolution. Evolution is the bringing out of what was concealed, of what was prior. Creation is creating something totally new. Evolution is not bringing out anything new but bringing forth what was already involved.

So there is a great difference between theories of creation, say of the Bible or some of our Puranic accounts, and the Theory of Evolution. That is why there is a controversy, in America particularly, that the theory of Evolution

and the philosophies based on it should not be taught in schools because they break the faith of children of tender age in the Bible, in the Christian faith because there it is said that God willed it, he said let there be light and there was light and for six days he created this world and on the seventh day he went to rest. There are people who literally believe it. The introduction of the evolutionary theory, philosophy, disturbs the conservative mind. So there has been a lot of controversy and some have gone to the courts. And America is such a vast country that there are 51 or more states, each state has a law of its own. The Federal Law does not extend to matters of education, health etc. So there are some states, say the South which is called the Bible belt, where evolution cannot be taught in the schools.

We come back to the transcendent Godhead. Now this Reality is transcendent because it is beyond all human categorisation. It is beyond all description, beyond practical relation. I say practical because essential relation is always possible and if essential relation was not possible, there would not be this earth-movement. It is a practical relationship that is not possible, that is why it is called *achintya*, unthinkable. Whatever you may think, however large your conception, you cannot hold the transcendent Reality. That is why it is ineffable, inexpressible, unthinkable.

Sri Aurobindo makes a telling observation that each one of us is indeed a form, of the Reality, *rūpa*. You know *nāma* and *rūpa* are philosophical expressions for name and form. He points out we see the *rūpa* but not the *svarūpa*. That is we do not see the essential rupa, the essential form, essential self-figuration. The same idea is expressed

in *Savitri* a number of times by Sri Aurobindo where he says — we catch at the forms of truth but the real truth escapes our grasp.

On this Transcendent which we shall call *That* — neither he nor she but *That* with a capital T, — all, all here are founded. He is the Supra-cosmic but not extra-cosmic, there is a relation. And this relation is through his *yoga-māyā*, his self-power. Maya is normally rendered as a power of illusion, power engendering falsehood but that is not the original meaning of Maya. Maya is the power that measures *mimīte iti māyā*, it measures out the immeasurable. Now to measure out what is immeasurable is a feat, it is something extra-ordinary. And that is how the sense of cleverness, the sense of cunning crept into the picture. By and by it became a power of falsehood. But it is not, Maya is a self-power of God, *devātma shakti*, lost in the process of its own workings. That is why we do not see it but we feel its results. This is the Yoga Maya by which he spreads himself.

We spoke of various conceptions and approaches, each one is based on a definite experience. But as rendered by our intellect, they become warring positions, conflicting statements. But in spiritual experience, — if you do not confine yourself to one superficial experience, — there is a unity. If we aver that the transcendent Reality is Supra-Cosmic, the consequences are that the Divine is different from us. We are limited, we are transitory, we are slaves of Nature, the Divine is eternal, infinite, deathless, without bounds, without limitations; so the Divine is different and we are different. The Divine is greater than us. So our goal should be there. When we dwell on this difference too much, there is a tendency to separate the Reality from our

earth-experience. And the Supra-Cosmic turns out to be Extra-Cosmic. That too has its basis in a particular extreme experience which answers to a certain poise of the soul in its relation with the Supreme.

But when we say the Divine is Extra-Cosmic, we must remember that it is also asserted that there is nothing outside the Eternal and the Real. The Extra-Cosmic theory cannot truly hold.

31. Unity of Manifestation

Before coming to the more difficult themes that form the subject-matter today, I thought you would be interested in a very interesting subject which has been taken for granted in our tradition and to which my attention was drawn yesterday. I was reading the last page of the *Hindu*. An eminent professor speaks of a great disciple of Acharya Madvacharya. He narrates the story that he was a founder of a school of Vedanta and everyday he would have a number of disciples around him. There was one ox on which he would place his written works. The ox would sit there and listen very patiently to whatever he was telling. He came to like the ox. The disciples, naturally, were jealous and they put some poison in the food meant for the ox. The Guru came to know and he communicated a particular mantra to the ox and it was saved. And he said the ox would be born as a human being in its next birth and write commentaries on his works. And so it happened; the ox was so born and wrote commentaries on all the works of the Teacher. He was known as Tikacharya, Master of commentaries. Narrating this incident, the Professor says, man can be born as an animal, born as an insect, come back to human life and he illustrates his remarks with this story.

I was in two minds whether to contradict or not but then I said that I should play my part in disabusing the public mind of a superstition. What he says cannot be

done. The law of evolution is such that once a soul has crossed over into the human belt, it cannot go back. Nature has erected so many barriers that normally there can be no back-sliding. So when grandmothers told us, if you do like this you will be born as a cat, as a dog and all that kind of thing, they were more or less well-intentioned stories to put some fear into us, but there is no truth in it but like many other superstitions it has got a hold on the public mind.

Once you come to the human level, you do not go back. But there are one or two exceptions, very rare, which Sri Aurobindo mentions. In evolution there are higher and higher stages of birth, the stone, the plant, the animal, then different types of animals and then the humans. It takes a long time, maybe thousands and thousands of years. An animal always aspires to become human; particularly the animals that are associated with human beings like horses, cats, faithful dogs, breathe so much of human atmosphere that they want to take birth as human beings. They are terribly jealous of the human power. Mother used to say that the one power that human beings have got above the animals is speech. That we misuse that power, abuse it, is another matter. But even a tiger shrinks a bit when you speak to it. As we said, an animal has always that aspiration. So, let us say, a particular animal on the strength of its aspiration which is helped by Nature, takes birth as a human being. In the first birth of an animal there is no soul as such, there is a soul-entity. When it takes birth it finds everything very difficult. That person behaves at times in an incoherent way; he cannot adjust himself to surroundings and we say that he is a half-baked person. The soul-entity of the animal may find it very diffi-

cult to bear the human body and support its life; it is not an easy task, in the complex organism that is the human being, to support it; it requires a concentration of consciousness. And finding it difficult it decides to go back to its animal stage, prepare itself and when it feels equal, come again to the human stage. Such an example can be there, though rare, of a human soul or a human being going back to the animal stage.

Next, as we have discussed earlier, if a person who has passed has certain strong desires, strong passions, which refuse to dissolve in the vital world, then that part or fragment of the vital being detaches itself from the main and comes to the earth zone and attaches itself or enters into some animal which is known for that particular desire or into an animal-like human, and it indulges itself. It satisfies itself in the raw and then it is dissolved. This entry of the fragment of the vital body of a human being from the vital plane into an animal is often treated as if a man has come to an animal birth. It is not. These are the two exceptions, otherwise an animal which has become a human being in the scale of creation cannot go back.

Along with this question there is another and that is the change of sex. It is very facilely said, particularly in Theosophical literature, that today you are a man, tomorrow you can be a woman. You can change and go on changing for experience. This does not happen. Sri Aurobindo explains that till a soul arrives at a stage when it can choose what line it wants, masculine or feminine, there can be variations. But once the soul arrives at a certain maturity of exercising its choice, it follows the same line of sex. Man is born as man and woman is born as woman. Here also there is an exception which Mother takes note

of and that is if, for instance, a man during his life time has a strong desire to experience the life of a woman or a woman to experience the life of man, the soul permits it; That person can very easily take birth in the sex that it wants. But this also pre-supposes that the person is highly evolved, evolved enough to impose his choice on the course of evolution.

Now to come back to our theme. I believe we were speaking of a supreme transcendent Reality, Supreme Being above everything, when it moves into manifestation, it takes the poise of an immutable Self, the impersonal, equally supporting all. Next the Power of the Supreme goes into action and diversifies the one into the many. And in this process of the diversification into many, the Divine Being enters into every form and stays immanent in it. It is immanent not only in the universal but also in each individual. This immanent divinity in each individual form is the inner Divine. Normally it is veiled by a number of our pseudo-selves but ultimately it is this divine presence that guides, oversees and gives a direction to the Nature. Nature is not something alien to the Being. Nature is the power, self-power of the Supreme Being to Become. It is called at various levels according to the function it performs by different appellations. There it is Yogamaya, then it is the Shakti, then the Prakriti, then the Svabhava. It is the same Power poising itself on different levels.

Note these four poises, the individual, the universal, immutable supporting the universe, the immanent pervading the universe and the Supreme transcending everything. Now Sri Aurobindo points out that when we say that all this is in the Divine, all this is in Brahman, the human mind is apt to think in a special concept that we are all

contained in this divine Reality. It is not a spatial extension. It is an extension in consciousness because when it moves to manifest, there is no time, there is no space. Even when we say the many in the One, the deployment of the One as the many on the higher planes, it is not spatial but in consciousness because time and space belong to the manifest.

Another point: the Divine contains the universe but he is not contained in it, that is he is not exhausted by the universe. There is a school of philosophy called Pantheism in which they identify everything here with God. They say Nature is God. Very well. But God is not only this all but he exceeds the all. A very subtle distinction. Each spiritual experience fastens upon one relation of the human soul with the Supreme. You may relate yourself to the individual presence, relate to the cosmic consciousness, to the Cosmic Being, you may relate yourself to the immutable Self, which is supporting, which is bearing on its bosom this multiple universe. You may relate yourself directly to the Supreme Purushottama. According as your relation is, is the philosophy that you propound. So, each philosophy has a base. They are not all intellectual speculations; particularly in the Indian philosophy, each is based on a spiritual experience and spiritual experience is essentially one, though various in expression. One does not cancel the other. To a higher vision all of them are complementaries bringing out different aspects, the different poises of the creative divine Power.

In all these, the Supreme, the immutable, the individual divinity and the Divine manifesting in the cosmic Nature, all constitute one Godhead, not in a spatial manner but in a very special way of the self-disposition of Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo points out *there* is a spiritual co-existence of the one in many; *here* it is extension in space and time. The Divine Self contains all existences, not materially but spiritually. Our mind is apt to think in a material way, things contained in That, but it is a spiritual pervasion and the only simile that helps us to understand it is the image of ether. All things are created and exist in ether; ether is there in everything but ether is not exhausted by what is manifest. Ether is above and beyond and yet always identified with everything. And the immanent divinity, like ether, is there even in the human body.

The Gita has a special word for those who disregard the Divine in the human body, *mānushim tanum āshritam*, who dwells in human body. It is the foolish, the ignorant who insult Me, says Sri Krishna. And the ways of insult are too many. He says elsewhere later, they punish the body; the austerities dry up the emotions and senses, they are asuric tapasyas and they hurt Me, he says, who am in the body. So, it is the Me who constitutes the Self supporting the entire evolution of the human being, also the soul who develops life after life. The Self, the Atman stays behind but the Jiva, the soul evolves. We call it in our philosophy the psychic being but in the Vedanta they call it the Jiva. They are like so many pearls on one string. There is an identity between the individual Divine, the Cosmic Divine, the immutable Self and the Supreme Divine.

The Mother points out that between the psychic being in each individual and the Supreme, there is a direct link. That is why she gives so much importance to the awakening and the cultivation and the bringing forward of the psychic being, which is in direct touch with the Supreme. One does not need to evolve through all the stages of

evolution to find and merge in the Supreme. It is a direct passage, that is why she says many stages can be covered once you have a certain identity between the psychic and the Supreme. And that is her contribution to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Sri Aurobindo, indeed, spoke of the *chaitya purusha* from the Vaishnava literature earlier but the special importance that he started giving to the psychic being and the chapters that he added in the 'Synthesis of Yoga' on the psychic and the Letters he has written on it, are a result of his acceptance of Mother's giving special importance to the psychic being. The Mother herself, it might interest you to know, got this conception from her occult teacher Theon, who spoke of the psychic. Of course, Mother developed a whole philosophy over it; Theon's ideas of the psychic were very rudimentary. They related only to the occult part of it but Mother developed the spiritual aspect of it.

32. Works, Devotion and Knowledge

We now come to the Chapter on Works, Devotion and Knowledge. The first part of the Gita developed the doctrine of works, followed by number of perceptions on the role of knowledge and then we were in the midst of discussion on Devotion, Bhakti, which reaches the climax in the Ninth Chapter. The Gita aims at a synthesis, a living synthesis, not an amalgamation of the three in the life of the seeker.

There is a very perceptive distinction made between the different aspects and the poises of the Divine Reality. First we have at the summit the Supra-cosmic Divine Being, the *Para Brahman*. The Para Brahman as the transcendent Being supports this entire creation by his very being there. Then comes the *Paramatman* who ensouls, functions as the Soul of everything, not just an individual soul but Soul of all. Third is *Purushottama*, the Supreme Person, who conceives and energises all formations in the universe. The fourth is *Parameshwara*, the Lord of Existence, the Master individually and collectively, who unrolls the cycle of the world. And it is from this Parameshwara that emanates the *Jiva*. Jiva is the living individual. Each individual soul is an emanation of the *Parameshwara*. So, we have the Para Brahman, the Paramatman, the Purushottama and the Parameshwara. Below all comes the Jiva, who is like a ray from the Parameshwara.

This Jiva is one with the Divine in essence. Note the distinction between essential and practical. Each one of us

is essentially one with the Divine, but in practice, in practical terms, we are involved in Prakriti, the lower Prakriti. Indeed when the Jiva is in the works of the Divine Prakriti, there is an identity, that too in essence but operationally there is a distinction. And in the lower appearance of Prakriti, the Jiva is absolutely experienced as other than him. And to get back to this one Truth of the Jiva is the purpose of life. Essentially we all are one with God. But pragmatically, in actuality, we are far removed. We are involved in the Nature, lower Nature. To get back from the lower Nature to the higher Nature, from the higher Nature to the Lord of Existence, Parameshwara, that is the object of life.

And how do we do that? The Gita counsels that one must acquire knowledge, knowledge of the Self. Who am I? Am I this shifting, changing personality, at the mercy of circumstances and happenings around me or is there something in me which justifies my feeling the same always? Someone pointed out that though from childhood till old age there are so many variations, so many changes, still the identity of the person continues to be the same. I remember what I was as a child, as a student, as a young person, as a middle-aged person, and an after-middle-aged person, but there is the same identity. Now that identity is because there is something eternal, something unchanging, deep at the core of my being and that is the Self. The Gita calls upon us to know what is the Self, realise the Self. It is not enough to realise my Self but to realise the eternal Self of the Universe and that is Brahman. Atman and Brahman are same as the Upanishad points out but they are in different categories, different statuses of the same Reality. So we have to know with the knowledge of Self and Brahman.

And we have to develop and grow in devotion and love for the Supreme Person, Purushottama. Knowledge is not enough, there has to be a certain melting of the Being in adoration to the Master of the Being. Nobody acquires this love at once. It starts, as Sri Aurobindo points out in the *Synthesis*, with the outer worship. Gradually this outer worship changes its character into an inner worship. The inner worship changes into adoration. Adoration is the celebration of the Master; whenever you see anything, whenever you touch anything, you always feel him, the Divine, the Master. Everything reminds you of him, everything links you with him. That is adoration, seeing him, feeling him and registering him in every movement of life. This adoration which is a continuous and enlarging movement develops into love.

Love is essentially self-giving. It is a logical culmination of the movement of adoration; you give yourself. And once this movement of giving yourself starts, it gathers momentum and you are not satisfied in any amount of giving yourself. There is never any taint of asking, of taking, but always giving. And that, Mother observes, is the supreme test of love whether at the human level or at the Divine level. You give yourself without claim, without demand, without expectation of recognition or exchange. Mother speaks of four or five grades, rungs of love. Ultimately it is an unconditional self-giving, self-giving to the Supreme Person.

Both knowledge and love articulate themselves in the exercise of the will. The will dedicates and consecrates itself in works to the Lord of the Cosmos. That is where works come in. So each leads to the other. It is only for mental clarity that we speak of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti as

though they were separate paths. In an integral path like ours, or the synthetic approach of the Gita, all the three inter-mingle. Wherever you start, the other two join.

And as a result of this synthesis of the three main movements of the soul, you begin to see and know Vasudeva, the Universal Being as All, not only know but you live in that knowledge. That is the secret. Many know theoretically that God is everywhere. You write about it, you write poetry, but do you live in that knowledge? Do you react to any impact as though it is an impact from Vasudeva? As long as you do not do that your knowledge is theoretical and it has no practical bearing.

The first step is to draw back from involvement, complete involvement in the movements and operations of Nature and touch the Calm, the Peace and plunge into the profounds of the Being where you touch the self-existent Spirit, that is the Self. And when you touch the Self, when you come under the influence of the Self effortlessly, you experience unity with the rest of the Universe, because the Self of one is the Self of All. So one movement is to indraw. The next movement is to look upward, an upward movement from the Self that you have reached, to a greater Eternal, the Supra-Cosmic, the Purushottama. Reaching the Self is only a step, a capital step, but thereafter you look upward to the transcendent Supra-Cosmic Self. Not only that, when you touch the depth, you aim at the height, there is a sudden realisation that the same Divine inhabits every form, the Divine Inhabitant in me and you, in every form, in everything. So, inward, upward, around, there are the three dimensions in which we experience the Divine Reality through a co-mingling of knowledge, works and devotion.

To summarise, we look through the Self to Paramatman, look up through the Divine Inhabitant to the Supreme Person. Now what is the difference between Para Brahman and Purushottama? Purushottama is a kind of personalised presentation. Self has no form but it is an existence. The Atman has no form but the Purusha, the Purushottama, the Person has. You can relate yourself in a personal way with him. And for that you start from the Divine Inhabitant; with the background of the Self there is a Divine Inhabitant. The Veda speaks of the Eternal Guest, but the Gita goes a step further and says he is the Inhabitant. He is the Master of the Being. He is the Master of the House. So through the Inhabitant to the Supreme Person. And through the Lord manifest in the Universe to the Supreme, because the Supreme exceeds the Universe. He manifests but what is manifested does not exhaust the whole of the Supreme.

The famous hymn in the Rig Veda also speaks of how 'He spread himself everywhere, the Original Person, and exceeded it by ten digits.' He exceeds what he manifests by ten digits. It is not to be taken arithmatically but to denote that the Universe does not exhaust him. And it is only when you realise him in all these poises that you have an integral realisation, *sarva bhāvena*, — a phrase to which Sri Aurobindo draws attention repeatedly.

This integral turning of the soul upward, Godward, is the basis of the synthesis of knowledge, works and devotion. And the Gita explains that to know is not enough. You may be learned, you may have profound ideas but it should result in the uplifting of the heart and soul, leading to an all-embracing love, adoration. When you really know, know not just by the mind but by the being, you cannot

help feeling devotion, feeling love: an all-embracing love and adoration, passion for the Divine in a self-existent Being in ourselves and in all. This is a special emphasis of Sri Aurobindo that to realise the Divine in himself is an incomplete realisation. You have to realise him above, realise him in yourself and realise him in all. Otherwise they are incomplete realisations, true in themselves but partial. It is only when you have this triple realisations that there is an adoration which expresses itself in offering the whole of life as a sacrifice.

Now, sacrifice is a joyous movement, there is no element of self-denial. The Sanskrit word *yajna* does not have the connotation of depriving yourself of something to give it to the Divine. There is no sense of deprivation but a joyous giving of what you have, what you are, to the Divine. Normally man is not in a position to do this sacrifice because his gaze is always outward and he is busy with external and superficial appearances, lost in the rounds of the ego. He is lost in the phenomenon and is blind to the truth of the phenomenon. So, the first part of the discipline is to go behind the phenomenon to know what is the truth of the phenomenon. It is in this process that there is a growth of a higher consciousness. And it is in this connection that Sri Aurobindo makes a profound observation that 'growth of God in man is man's proper business'. Not your realising God but growth of God in you. When this is promoted within and without, all becomes Divine. All life becomes a poem of devotion.

In this background, you will appreciate how by knowledge, real knowledge, you do not arrive at some abstract unity with the Absolute, something Ineffable; real knowledge leads you to adoration of the Purushottama. And the

adoration is on the wings of a heartfelt seeking of the Supreme and the Universal. There is a repeated emphasis on what is Supreme and what is Universal. Both are interlinked and the linking focus between the Universal and the Supreme is the Individual. It is in Man that Soul and Nature, the Universal and the Transcendent, come together.

So knowledge leads to adoration and because of adoration, the way of Works becomes effective. In this context it is useful to know that the sacrifice that is pictured in the Veda is not just an external oblation but an inner movement, an inner self-giving and consecration in which all the energies, all the faculties of the human being participate. And when this inner ablation, the inner yajna is done with sincerity, with devotion, with understanding, the Gita observes in a famous verse, that the Divine himself becomes the sacrifice, himself the oblation, himself the act of offering and himself the result of offering.

And in the Vedic context, Sri Aurobindo observes that *mantra*, the powerful word of the Veda helps in this culmination of identity between the human and the Divine. The Mantra of Divine Consciousness brings forth the light of revelation. Again Mantra is not of one kind. The Rik, its literal meaning is 'shining', exudes light. So the Mantra of Light brings revelation. That is called the Rik. And the Mantra of Divine Power brings the Will of effectuation, that is Yajus. Then again the Veda is supposed to consist of Mantras for rituals but behind this external meaning, is the word of Effectuation. The Rik is the word of Revelation, it gives you the Light; Yajus is the Word of Effectuation, it gives you the Will and Sama is the Mantra of Ananda, it gives the fulfilment of the spiritual delight of existence. The tunes of Sama, the flow of Sama, the *Sāma*

mantra fills you with delight. There are harmonies. Thus, these three divisions of the Vedic Mantras: Rik, Yajus and Sama, help towards attainment of Light, attainment of Will, attainment of Bliss. And all these are realised when there is a combination of Knowledge, Will and self-surrender, Bhakti.

In this connection Sri Aurobindo speaks how what is AUM, the Word of Sanction in the ritual of the Veda is also applicable in the inner sacrifice because the first syllable 'A' refers to the physical, external universe; the second 'U' refers to the subtle state where things are being prepared to be released into physical manifestation. The Third 'M' refers to the sleep state or the trance state where things are being brooded upon in their seed form before they are released into the subtle form on their way to the external form. And beyond all these there is the Self, the fourth state, the Self which has no name, of which these three are states. So, he who does the inner yajna realises the truth, the Reality in all these three states and realises also that Self-Existent Self of which all these are varying conditions.

33. The Supreme Word

To continue from the point where we had to suspend our discussion last time, we have seen that the entire surrender of the being to the Highest is the central theme. Always the highest is the Ideal. There are of course, the lesser gods, attainable by lesser sacrifice, by lower degrees of surrender. Whereas sacrifice to the Supreme and Universal Divine leads to divine life, sacrifice to the partial godheads takes us to lesser goals. But we are assured by the Lord that the Divine meets our aspirations even through the lesser gods. Sacrifice is the link, the thread of connection between the soul and the All-soul.

Any kind of sacrifice to be worth its name has to culminate in absolute surrender. And this surrender, Sri Aurobindo emphasises again and again, is the crown of all synthesis. Everything has to be done as offering. That does not forge chains of Karma because there is no motivation of desire and ego but only one thought, one feeling that it is a movement of the soul towards the All-soul. In the process one awakes to the equal Divine Presence in all. It is the ego that makes distinctions, the good and the bad, the favourable and the unfavourable, brings in preferences. But once the ego is given the go-bye, one gets slowly aware of the equal Divine Presence in all. When this equal Divinity is established in our consciousness, the Gita points out that men and women find their equal right before God. The woman is not treated as something inferior. Even the

sinner turns into a saint, whatever his past, by the simple act of surrender to the Divine. And we are told in picturesque language, the Divine himself comes to us and takes up our burden, when the soul gives up its ego and offers all work. The whole point is, the importance of work is never reduced whatever the state of our realisation. However far we arrive towards identity, oneness through devotion and love, the importance of work continues; as long as we live in the world, activity, work has to be done. And the only way is to turn it into spiritual terms by making a sacrifice of it, however imperfect our way, however fallible our understanding, 'he who loves ME shall not perish'. This is the assurance given by the Avatar, *na hi kalyānakrit kaschit durgatim gachhati*. The key is to turn from the outward to the inward. Love of the world must change into love of God. Easy enough to say but these are watchwords which should guide us at every step. From the outward to the inward, from the world to God. And in the process we discover that the world itself is God, God is the world.

Then we come to the Supreme Word of the Gita. Sri Aurobindo sums up the argument so far developed in the earlier chapters and points out that withdrawal into the Immutable and Impersonal Self is not an end in itself. In many Yogas, to desist from motivated activity and withdraw into the One Self is the goal, but not in the Gita, much less in the Integral Yoga. It is only the first step, for beyond the Impersonal Self is the Ishwara, the Godhead in human form. Where we start depends upon our perception of the Divine, whether we conceive of the Divine as the Lord, as the Ishwara, the ruler of the world, or the immortal Self. It depends upon our perception. Our way and our realisation differ from each other according to our

perception of what the Divine is. So whatever our perception, whatever our way, one thing is certain that we are the finite, limited formations. The Divine is the Infinite. So some link is required, some entry from the finite that we are, to the Infinite that we are to be. Some mental conception or some power of Nature has to be seized. Each one has to look into one's nature and see what is one's way, whether it is the way of thought, way of devotion or way of will; whether it is natural to conceive of God as a person with whom one can build up relations, or as an impersonal Reality in which one can merge oneself. In any case, some link has to be forged and according to the link forged, according to the gate of entry that we open, is the response. He assures, *ye yathā mām prapadyante tān tathaiva bhajāmyaham*, as men approach ME, in that manner I receive them unto MY love. A philosophic mind seeks through abstractions, this is not That, this is not That, *neti, neti*, this is transitory, this is not worth it, but That is eternal, permanent. You go on rejecting ending in a kind of rejection of the world and absorption in the Reality, Impersonality. In the process you arrive at some kind of annihilation, a kind of Nirvana of your personal self. That is the trend of seeking through the philosophic mind. But the philosophic mind is not the only faculty we are having. We have the heart with its emotions, the will with its drive, dynamism, and we have a positive mind which strains towards the Eternal and the Infinite. That is where the way of love, the way of works come in, you cannot escape them, however much you persuade yourself that knowledge, Jnana is the path. Even severe disciplines like Buddhism have had to accept the claim of life and develop the 'Right Path' towards the Reality, whether you conceive of it as

Brahman or Nirvana! Without a discipline of living and universal compassion with love at its base, Buddhism could not get a hold on the mind of humanity.

Similarly, even in the approaches of Mayavada, Illusionism, they have had to accept the practical reality. They call it Vyavahara and Paramartha; the practical reality of the world in which we exist had to be accepted, man has to develop some kind of relation from his level. So even Shankara has to speak of *Bhaja Govindam*, devotion, worship, actions with a spiritual slant. They may say ultimately that these are all preparatory, but upto a very far stage, life has to be governed and developed in the mould of active dynamism and devotion. You cannot live and proceed by knowledge alone. It is true, Sri Aurobindo points out, that too much absorption in the Divine Personality alone, means a certain duality — I am the worshipper and He is the worshipped, I adore and He is the adored. This does not give the whole truth of matter. It falls short of complete absorption in the Eternal and union by identity. Union by identity means I merge myself, I merge my consciousness, and my personality recedes. That also is an experience, that also is a realisation, which completes the realisation of the Divine Personality. Both are necessary. Quietistic spirituality leads to depreciation of life; to withdraw, to always emphasise on quiet, to turn one's back on the activity leads to a devaluation of life in the world and the individual soul. But in love, with will, one forges relation of the individual to the Divine. The individual also acquires importance.

In the Adwaitic path the individual loses his importance because ultimately the individual never existed. He imagines he exists, to put it crudely. But in the other paths

the individual exists. The individual realises, not that he is divine but he is a part of the Divine, a portion of the Divine, *mamaiva amshah*, as the Gita points out.

In developing this synthesis of knowledge, love and works, the Gita gives us a very comprehensive spiritual view of God, Man and Universe. It gives sustaining value to the existence of man the individual, the universe in which he functions and God who presides over both. The Gita's approach gives value to all the three. It brings out the truth of life from the ancient Upanishads. In the later intellectual thinking, the Darshanas, the philosophies, reduced everything to a process of thinking and logic, forgetting what the Upanishads and the Vedas speak on the basis of revelation and intuition. Not that the scheme that the Gita gives is complete, sufficient for all times. At the time at which it was presented, it was adequate but has left many lacunae, many points to be developed, there is much to be filled up.

In sum, it emphasises that we realise the Divine not by denying relations, relations with the world, relations with others, but through relations we develop our relation with God by subtlising, purifying our relations with our fellow men. Human relations also have an importance in the scheme of the Gita. What is required is to break through the veil of ignorance which gives us a perverted sense of values. Each path prepares for a certain aspect of Truth but a synthetic and a comprehensive approach leads towards the fuller Truth. Through relations we develop our approach to God.

But what about the Impersonal Self, the Atman? Even that Sri Aurobindo points out, is not void of relations. It is our witness; the Self does not turn its back on life. In the

very act of witnessing, it supports! A silent impersonal sanction for the activity of Nature and an impassive enjoyment.

When we think of God as Ishwara we must note that Ishwara also is the same as Brahman. In Mayavada, Ishwara is only a reflection of Brahman in the Maya; Ishwara has no real existence. But that is not the truth. Ishwara is the same as Brahman, the same Reality in different poises. It is understood that the Godhead that the Gita speaks of, the Purushottama, is not the limited personal God of religions. He is the God of Gods, *devasya devah*. He rules from beyond and from within. He rules, he does not just watch. From that point of view, what we call Para Brahman is also Parameshwara. Parameshwara is not the God of the Bhakti cults. Even in the Vedantic parlance Parameshwara and Para Brahman are the same. Things appear different because of the illusive ignorance of the lower Prakriti. We have seen that Prakriti, lower nature, is not everything. There is a higher Nature, which is the true creatrix. That is the Power of God.

To sum up, all creatures and objects are becomings of the one Divine Reality. All life is a working of the Power of the one Lord, the *parā prakriti*. All nature is a manifestation of the One Infinite. All multiplicity is a deployment of the One Reality. To speak in more popular language, he is the Godhead in man. The Jiva, what we call our soul or our being, is the spirit of his Spirit. It is a portion, a fragment. And he is not only the Godhead in man but also the Godhead in the Universe. It is the same. This world in space and time is his phenomenal self-extension because there are other worlds outside our space and time. Phenomenal extension is not the only way of manifestation,

there is the spiritual self-extension above space and time. So the whole argument leads to this conclusion that the Divinity, whether in its creative poise, witness-poise or overseeing poise, is the One. It deploys itself in different statuses. And according to our pull, according to our affinity, we start. But wherever we start, if we are open, if our vision is comprehensive, all the three paths, the routes of love, action and knowledge synthesise and culminate in a supreme act of surrender.

34. Becoming

What we have discussed so far and what we are going to develop today covers hardly about 20 verses of the 10th Chapter. Most of the readers of the Gita miss many nuances of the words used, the combinations made and it is only when one reads Sri Aurobindo's exposition that one realises how much one is apt to miss in taking the text of the Gita very literally. Much is said, of course, but much more is unsaid. It is said between the lines. When I was comparing the eight or ten verses that form the subject matter of today, I was surprised how Sri Aurobindo approaches the Supreme Secret or the Supreme Word from so many angles, from so many levels. His one concern is to give a total and an integral approach so that no aspect of God's creation is missed and no part of the human being is left uncultivated.

He speaks of the Supreme Godhead having different poises. We are now familiar with his presentation that the Supreme Godhead is not only there on the transcendent levels but he poises himself on different levels in different forms, grades of consciousness, concentrations of power. First he speaks of the Supreme Godhead as the Atman, Soul — impersonal, immutable, quiet, calm. But the Gita does not stop with that enunciation of the Self. It calls upon man to awake to this Presence and unify with it. Now how am I to unify with the Impersonal Self? I am an active person involved in multifarious activities of the world, not

all of which are of my voluntary choice. How am I going to connect myself with the Imperishable Self in my impersonal Being? If I hold back from the surface froth of my personality, gradually I become conscious of something impersonal. That is not the Atman, mind you, but it is a layer of my being which is not involved. I am not to mistake that for the Self. But there is a level of my being which has a certain impersonality about it, which is not easily upset or disturbed. It is at that level that I have to unify myself with the Impersonal Self. Second, the Supreme Godhead is the Godhead in man. Man has to awake to this God within, not the Atman; Atman is different from the God in the sense that the Atman is aloof but our conception of God is that he is involved, takes cognisance of the movements, of the becomings of Nature. Man has to awake to this Presence and become united with this hidden Master of the Being. In a sense, it is more difficult than uniting with the impersonal Self. To dig deeper and in the inmost cells to link oneself, and to be identified with the Godhead within, these are two steps that a seeker has to take.

And once I become conscious, once I link myself with this Godhead within, I realise that this Godhead is also the Godhead in all beings. This perception and experience compels me to discover my spiritual unity with all creatures. And the test whether I have realised my unity with the other creatures is that I feel each one as my Self. There is no sense of separativity. The others are not "others" but my Self poised in other bodies. This is called realisation of the Universal Self. Unity, unity not at the mental level with the conviction that all are one, not at the emotional level radiating waves of good-will, friendliness, love, but a total identification of my Self with others.

Next, this Godhead is the origin of all; it has become all these existences through its power of Nature. The One has become the Multiple — The One and the Many. But the One does not cease to be One by disporting itself as the Many. By its own power it spreads itself to perceive this One in all. To adore this One in all, *Vāsudevah sarvam iti*, is to realise the consciousness of universality.

We are speaking of different phases of realisation of the Divine Reality: the Impersonal Self, the Divinity within oneself, with the Divine around in the world and the Divine not only being the origin but also all existences in detail. Even what look to us to be perverse, deformed, are parts of the process. Simply because a person or a situation is full of evil, it does not mean that it is divorced from God. God is there behind the darkness, if only we have the eye to probe and the patience to bear. This is a very essential point in Sri Aurobindo's approach that what we call good and bad, evil and the right, are not permanent realities, they are changing. Each one serves the cosmic purpose by its goodness, by its badness. And it is only when we transcend these dualities that we begin to see the necessity of these different values for the emerging perfection.

To realise the Divine Self in the Universe is not a passionless, a relationless identity. In the Upanishads we always hear of *avyavahāryam*, what cannot be related to; we have only to experience it, no relationship is possible. But Sri Aurobindo says that is what the Gita calls for. It is a larger and a richer oneness which fulfills the cosmic purpose, not ignores, not skirts the Divine Intention.

He takes up the various human relations — father, mother, friend, lover, many kinds, and observes that each relationship properly cultivated should lead to its fulfilment in God. Each relationship is a step, if we cultivate it

properly, to an eventual relationship at the level of God. An integral seeker is to awake to this many-sided revelation of God in all ways at different levels. We have to perceive, to seek the presence of Divinity in every kind of relation. It may be deformed, it may be perverted but at the core, at the essential level, there is what Yajnavalkya speaks to his wife: one does not love the husband for the sake of the husband or the wife for the sake of the wife but because of the Self. The Self in me looks to the Self in you and there is a leap. My Self may not feel the same way to the Self in all persons but there is an instinctive leap with a particular Self. That is because the Self recognises itself in another form on the same wave-length. Our wave-lengths may differ. So, it is not for the sake of the external form, external beauty that there is this attraction. At the bottom of attraction, unless it is a blatantly, vitally or physically based attraction, there is some core of Divinity bringing the two together. If you look at things from that angle, every experience changes its character.

And there is the Supreme Word: to adore him as the Supreme and Divine Origin of All, not only the origin of all but also the Lord of the World. The world is not something that he creates and leaves it but it is a Becoming. It is Becoming of a Being. The Being is involved in the Becoming at every step. That is why Sri Aurobindo hesitates to use the word creation. Creation means the creator, the act of creation and the created; all these three are different entities. But when he speaks of Being and Becoming, the Being itself changes — *parināma* — into a state of Becoming. The world is his Becoming.

Unified knowledge and devotion; love is the Supreme Yoga to which the Gita has brought us at this moment.

Once this identity is forged, how do you act, how do you behave, on what basis do you act? Bhakti founded upon an opening to knowledge is the motive power of works. It involves acceptance by the mind and the heart of the devotee. That is, not Bhakti alone but an enlightened Bhakti, not knowledge alone, not dry metaphysical knowledge alone but knowledge as a culmination of love; these two constitute the Supreme Yoga.

And what is Bhakti, what is devotion? We are all familiar with the Gita's classification of the four types of Bhakti, we have discussed it earlier. Delight of the heart in God is true Bhakti. The heart joys in the concept of God, in the idea of God. This is true Bhakti, true devotion. There is no reason, there is no expectation, there is a spontaneous ebullition of delight. And the Lord says, he speaks to Arjuna these secrets because he has it. At the moment when he is engaged in this conversation, Arjuna, as a result of what has been said, is filled with delight in the heart and has acquired the competence to receive the Supreme Word.

Knowledge based on devotion is something that bridges the cosmic process in Time and the Supra-cosmic Eternity. In the Vedanta there is an unbridgeable gulf between that Eternity, the Infinity and this changing complex in the Space and Time. It is only by with-drawing from it, turning our back from this movement, that we begin to sense this the Eternal and the Infinite. But the kind of knowledge that the Gita advocates is one that bridges this gulf, relates this Cosmic process in Time with the Supra-Cosmic Eternity.

Note that this Eternal has no origin, origin as we conceive it. The Divine is unborn, it is the origin of the Uni-

verse, it becomes the Universe but it remains unstained; it remains what it is. And this knowledge, when we realise it, liberates ignorance.

Incidentally, Sri Aurobindo refers to the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism of the Western philosophy says that all Nature is God; everything is God, the plants are God, the animals, the birds, all are God. Pantheism limits God to all this. But God is something more also, God is not exhausted by what he has created. Nature does not exhaust God. God creates and he exceeds the Creation. Sri Aurobindo observes that it is because he transcends, he stands above, that he can truly create. Thus Pantheism is true enough as far as it goes but it limits our conception and our experience.

This transcendence of the Divine, is not a negation of what exists here. It does not absolve itself from all relations with this world. All cosmic relations derive from it. Ultimately all relations here are derived from That. And because the Divine is all, there is no separate entity like the Devil or a Dark Being. All deformations and perversions in our world are part of an ongoing process which do not affect the purity of the origin.

How does what is Eternal, the Infinite throw itself in the rounds of Time, in extension of Space? Lord Krishna speaks of the seven Rishis, *Saptarishis*, they are mentioned in the Veda and, of course, in the Puranas, they are the Intelligence Powers of the Divine Wisdom. The one Prajna, Intelligence, diversifies itself. There are seven planes of existence based upon seven principles of Truth and on each level there is one Power totalling to seven; they are the seven Rishis. They are the Powers of Divine Wisdom on each level of existence.

And then he speaks of the four Manus. Manus are mental beings, creators of a mental order and they are responsible for the four-fold order of the human society. The four-fold order of the human society is also reflected in the four-fold stream of the human consciousness — knowledge, power, organisation and harmony, and service. When you consider from a social angle, there are so many categories of human effort. We may call them castes here in India, they may call them classes in the West but they are certain classifications according to Nature. Sri Aurobindo points out that corresponding to this four-fold division, not exactly division but classification, of the human collectivity, in each individual also all these four principles are embedded. Thus we have the four Manus, the Mental Beings, who are the creators of this four-fold life in active Nature.

Lord Krishna refers to these Saptarishis and four Manus who are responsible for the developing organisational system in human collectivity in Nature. And of these originators of the four-fold order, the seven-fold manifestation, the origin is above in the transcendent Absolute. But the Absolute is not a composite, a total of the many but an originating Absolute. Any number of formations, any number of becomings brought together, totalled up, do not make up the Absolute. The Absolute is still beyond.

One point to be noted is that this Becoming does not limit the Being. To our limited mind each becoming exhausts the Being to that extent. Some energy is drawn and is consolidated in another form; to that extent it deprives the original store of that total of energy; but in the Divine logic it remains the same. There is the famous verse in the Isha Upanishad — *Purnasya purnam ādāya purnam eva*

avasishyate — take out the full from the full, the full remains. This is contrary to human logic but as Sri Aurobindo says, it is the magic of the Infinite.

The power that develops all this is the power of God, Atma-Shakti. It is not an alien power which somehow comes into being and foists all creation on the white and pure bosom of God, or Brahman. It is the Atma-Shakti, *devātma shakti*, it is the Self as Power. And it is because of this Atma-Shakti that our objective existence has a spiritual origin. Even what we call lower Nature is not essentially different from the Power, Atma-Shakti; it is a subordinate development, a secondary movement. It is an expressive figure of the Godhead, though disfigured by the Cosmic Ignorance; it is the figure of the Godhead, however deformed. That is why the Gita constantly speaks of *bhūtāni*. Bhuta does not mean spirits or ghosts but from the root *bhu, bhava, bhūta, bhūtāni*. All creatures are the Becomings of God and the Becoming is not the opposite of Being. Becoming is a development of Being, always keeping the relation with the parental Being, not something contrary, not opposite.

In all this we have to keep in mind the down-look of the Transcendent. The Transcendent is beyond and above but it has not turned its back on this creation which is its own emanation. The Transcendent relates Itself at every moment with what has issued from itself.

Side by side, there is a close Immanent presence of the Divine Government of the Universe. Immanent — indwelling in everything. There is God above, no doubt, but in everything here, in every existence, in every form there is an Immanent Presence. And this Immanent Presence again is not something that is passive, not something that

just witnesses and allows the surface being to do whatever it wants to do, but from its level it governs. There is a Divine Government of the Universe from the Immanent Reality. It is not there without a purpose. It is not there as something imprisoned in form. There is a purpose, there is a truth in its being inherent in every form, it governs from there. Maybe, there is no direct government in our state of ignorance and falsehood but when we trace it to the origin, the governance is from the Divine Immanent Reality. In other words, he is not aloof, he governs from within and above.

This effective knowledge, not just philosophical understanding, not a logical conception, is dynamic; it changes the character, changes the structure of life. Such an effective knowledge alone can free us from bewilderment in this world of ignorance.

Wisdom, Knowledge, are not an unrelated Impersonality. We are apt to think that Jnana gives a sense of unrelatedness; that is only the first step. A larger knowledge embraces, comprehends That of which it is the knowledge. So it is not unrelated to Impersonality. The seeker is aware of Transcendence, Immanence and even when he realises the Universality of Spirit, there is always a consciousness relating to the Transcendent. Even when one is individually in touch with, linked with the Divinity within, there is always a universal dimension. So, the individual, universal and transcendent — these are three inter-related dimensions from which we cannot run away, whatever our philosophy. When we have this knowledge embedded in ourselves, it turns into love and adoration of the Supreme.

To this end, the argument of the first 20 verses of the 10th Chapter leads us to giving us an integral perspective

that everything is related to everything else. Nothing is truly compartmentalised. If our mind, our mental logic fails to connect things, to appreciate this inherent unity, it is the fault of our mental equipment. It does not make any difference to the Reality, the comprehending Reality, which is transcendent, immanent, individual — universally immanent and individual.

We will take up the next block of verses which deal with Vibhutis, concentrations of the Divine Power. We have spoken of the seven Rishis, the four Manus and now we move to the Vibhutis, the concentrations of consciousness power in certain personalities, in certain forms, all of which may not strike us as spiritual but they are emanations with a purpose. They are the Vibhutis, an interesting subject.

35. Vibhuti

The thought of the Gita has so far given us an integral vision of the Reality. We have studied that there is a Transcendent Reality above all that is created, manifested. It is above, but it is not cut off from what exists. It is superior, beyond this existence. Then we have seen this Reality that is transcendent takes a poise of the Impersonal, the Immutable Self, Akshara, which supports from behind all activity, all movement but without participating. It is characterised by peace, serenity and eternity. Next it moves into an active poise, the Kshara, the movable, the mutable, the mutable Reality, the mutable Self, which renders itself in so many multiple Jivas, you can call souls, objects. And there is the fourth poise where the Self is not only spread out in and as the universe, but also it is inherent, it is in-dwelling in each being, in each form, in each object as the individual Spark of the Reality. So, the Divine Reality not only pervades the Universe but it also in-dwells each form And the nature of the Divine Reality, from all accounts, is one of Bliss, one of knowledge, one of Power and various derived values.

Arjuna's question is, if this is so — and I have now no doubt that it is so because you (Lord Krishna) say that — how to see the Divine in all these things: ugliness, wrong, injustice, deformation, detraction, everywhere things are so contrary to what we are told to expect? And how can there be evil, so much ugliness in this universe, if all is

God? How is it that there are things that are not God, not only not God but anti-God, opposite to God?

The Gita does not shirk the problem. It says, — though not in só many explicit words, — that everything in this Universe is a result of certain activity of the Divine Power. The Divine Power is the Supreme Prakriti, Para Prakriti, the inherent Power of God. It is due to its throbbing, its vibrations that all these things have come to be. This is a feature at every level of existence. If we see contrary things which we do not expect where the Divine Power is in action, in manifestation, it is because our vision is limited. We see only the appearances of things. What we see normally is not what is. As a result we think that the superficial phenomenon that we see is all. Our limited vision, limited understanding, are bewildered, naturally, by what they presume to be the whole character of the Universe.

It is pointed out that the Supreme Power at our level of existence is not directly operative on the phenomenal level. It holds itself back and lets the lower Prakriti, the Universal Nature as the frontal aspect of the Divine Power, work out the intention of the unseen, unrealised Power. The frontal Power is given full freedom and facility to work out the object, the intention under the conditions of ignorance, ego and desire that form the present conditions of the earthly existence. So it is in the process of working out all these deformations that we see the clash of right and wrong, true and untrue, the beautiful and the ugly. But the fact is that even what is ugly, even what is evil, continues to do what it does because there is a secret support of the Divine Power from within.

So the Divine takes the full responsibility of whatever happens in this terrestrial existence. It does not need phi-

losophers to find out ways of escape, to shift the responsibility from God to some Maya or to some Devil. It is said, God owns the debt to Man. All the misery, all the clashes, all the disharmonies are there because they are permitted, permitted with a purpose to work out, to grow. Growth of the soul, Jiva, is not possible under the present conditions except through friction, through clashes, through battling of contraries; they are part of the game.

This whole world is, to the last detail, a Becoming of the Being. The Being that is Divine chooses to Become all this of which we are a part. The Becoming of the Divine Power is graded in each thing. This is what we call gradation of consciousness. Even among human beings everybody's consciousness is not the same, everybody's power is not the same. It is according to the state of the evolution of the soul, the jiva, that the consequent facilities obtain. The Becoming in a stone, in a mineral, in a plant, in an animal, in man, is necessarily of different grades. Becoming is not a creation, it is bringing out of what is already contained. In Sanskrit they have a very expressive word *sṛṣṭi*. Sristi means release, *sṛ* to release. You cannot release a thing unless you have it. It is not that you put certain things together and there is a new formation. In each thing the power of Becoming of God arrives at a certain state corresponding to the readiness of the soul, readiness of the involved divine Spark to benefit from it, to become ready to go beyond that level.

In this sense, everyone, is a Vibhuti. Vibhuti is a Becoming of God, but for the purpose of manifestation, for working out the purpose of the Supreme, this Power becomes intense in certain individuals according to the needs of the situation. Human qualities are in a pre-eminent

degree, they almost appear to be divine qualities. On this terrestrial globe there are certain concentrations of different fields, pre-eminent powers, *yadyat vibhūtimat ūrjitam*, exceedingly glowing. They are real Vibhutis. Technically, everyone of us is a Vibhuti but in factual relevance only those who are specially concentrated and who can wield that power, are called Vibhutis. To sum up, a Vibhuti is a special manifestation of a particular power of God in order to further the purpose of manifestation.

And this Vibhuti is not confined only to the spiritual sphere. It is not that every saint is a Vibhuti, every Rishi a Vibhuti, every Yogin a Vibhuti. A Vibhuti can appear in any field, in any sphere of life. We have Vibhutis in literature like Vyasa, Kalidasa, Shakespeare. We have Vibhutis in military science like Samudragupta, Napolean; we have Vibhutis in political sphere who have contributed originally to the development of political consciousness. We have artists like Leonardo da Vinci. A Vibhuti need not have a spiritual character. A Vibhuti can be a non-believer but because he embodies and manifests a certain power of God to a pre-eminent degree, he is a Vibhuti. It is possible that a Vibhuti is also a Saint.

You will ask what is the difference between a Vibhuti and an Avatar? Sri Aurobindo points out that every Avatar is also a Vibhuti but every Vibhuti need not be an Avatar, and is not. The distinction which is palpable to the common mind is that an Avatar is conscious, always conscious of his divinity, that his consciousness is not human but something else. He may not choose to reveal his identity but he is conscious. A fact which has been extremly well rendered in the current presentation of Mahabharata on the T. V., where if you watch the character of Lord

Krishna, even when those who know remark on his supreme divinity, he has only a slight enigmatic smile but he does not confirm. Rarely does an Avatar proclaim himself but he is always conscious. Sri Aurobindo points out, he may not proclaim himself but he may permit the disciples to say that. That we have seen in many cases.

A Vibhuti is not conscious of his divine origin. Normally a Vibhuti is full of himself, his power, his capacity, his potential, the work that he is doing; he can be very egoistic, rajasic. He is concentrated on what he is to do. He is not conscious that what he embodies is something else, the Divine. A Vibhuti is rarely conscious of the divine origin of his consciousness and power. But an Avatar always is. Further you cannot measure a Vibhuti in terms of your standards of morality, ethics, of social respectability, you cannot. He is concerned with his work regardless of every other consideration.

An Avatar is born as such; a Vibhuti need not be. He may be but he need not be. The Vibhuti consciousness can take possession of an individual when he is ready to become an instrument. Even as the Vibhuti consciousness can possess a person when the occasion calls for it, when the person is ready, it can also withdraw. There are heroes, ordinary personalities, who on the inspiration of the moment have acted divinely, but when the hour is gone they have sunk to ordinary proportions because the work is done or the capacity is exhausted and the person becomes ordinary. I have had occasion to see persons who were extra-ordinarily gifted, exercised tremendous influence and worked wonders but later on things dwindled and it was only a shell that remained. That cannot happen to an Avatar.

To come back to the point, a Vibhuti is a pre-eminent manifestation of a particular quality or power. And to drive home the point, Lord Krishna gives an account "among poets I am Ushanas, among seers I am Vyasa." And then he says, "among Pandavas I am Arjuna, among the Vrishnis I am Vasudeva." The highest point reached and manifested in each sphere is Vibhuti. Lord Krishna lists a whole panorama of these Vibhutis who have dotted the Cosmic history. The highest reached, the highest manifested in all spheres of manifestation is I, says Lord Krishna. At the height of all Vibhutis is the Lord.

In another sense this world itself is a Vibhuti of God, a manifestation of God. He adds, however, even the entire manifestation of the world represents only a single ray of his Infinitude. You cannot measure the immensity, the greatness and the glory of the Purushottama, the Supreme Divine.

After preparing Arjuna to receive the truth of this vast manifestation, the Lord now proceeds to reveal himself visually, as the *Viṣva rūpa*, the Universal Godhead.

36. Visva Rupa Darshana

We are today in the 11th Chapter dealing with Visva Rupa Darshana, revelation of the Universal Godhead. We have seen that Arjuna has been educated, among other things, into the Truth of the Divine as the Mutable Self, Kshara, the Impersonal, Akshara, and also as the Transcendent, Purushottama. He has been told how all the three are but poises of one Purusha. Also explained, that there are two Natures, the lower Nature, Apara Prakriti and the higher, Para Prakriti, which is a Power of God. It has been dinned into his ears that the Divine is there not only transcendentally, not only universally but also individually, in the heart of each creature. He is enjoined to awake to this Presence, Omnipresence of God. He now knows that the way of Works through sacrifice, the way of Knowledge through discrimination and the way of Love by adoration and devotion, all meet at some point. Keeping with the universal character of the manifestation of God, it has been emphasised that one can approach God, the Lord of the Being, the Master of the Universe, in any way one chooses and as men approach, he receives them into his Love.

After this knowledge has sunk into his being, Arjuna is, naturally, curious to see what is the Form of God. One cannot see the transcendental form, one cannot see the Immutable, so he begs of Lord Krishna to show him his own Form. And the Lord in his Grace responds to his prayer and says; here I am, you see me as I am. But then,

he adds: you cannot see me with your human eye. It is only a divine eye that can behold. Even the Gods, the sages, cannot see unless they have the divine vision. And he gives that vision to Arjuna so that he may behold the form of Glory, the wondrous figure of his Universal Form.

And Arjuna sees, one after another, a number of flitting forms, at this moment this, next moment another, it is a continuous vision of variegated forms, all passing through Lord Krishna's manifested Being. And as he sees, he also comes to a stage when he sees him as Time the Destroyer, Kala Purusha. He sees a thousand tongues lapping up the flesh and the blood of men who are slain in battle, soldiers and hosts of armies rushing into his Mouth, not to be seen again. And he is overcome by fear, he quivers. He sees the Rishis, the sages singing the Glory of God trying to pacify the Destroyer, the Time. He says: I have seen enough, I cannot bear to see any longer. Who art Thou really, I have seen so many changes? Then the Lord tells him that he has been there from the beginning, he is the Origin of all, he has created this Universe, he keeps it alive, he withdraws in Death, he is Death. He spells out his various modifications in the course of this manifestation. Arjuna exclaims: it is enough, I cannot bear any longer, show me thy normal serene form with thy four hands. And the Lord complies with his wish and once again reveals the usual form which Arjuna is used to.

During this spell of Revelation, Arjuna is overcome by the majesty and the splendour of the Form. He realises that he has not recognised this true form, true stature of Lord Krishna all his life. In contrition he says: forgive me, I have treated you as a friend, I have treated you like a relation, I have treated you as a human. I must have insulted

you, I may have said something in jest; forgive me. Gradually the superhuman Form is replaced by the human and Arjuna is restored to normalcy.

Sri Aurobindo draws pointed attention to one or two features which the Gita intends to emphasise in this apocalypic vision. First, the Lord is not only the friend of the peoples, Father of the World, but he is also the Destroyer as Time. He creates, he preserves, he withdraws, and all are part of his working. Destruction is as much a part of his manifestation as construction; when a thing or a system or an institution or a civilisation or an order becomes effete, lifeless, does not move with the times, becomes moribund, it is time for it to be destroyed, so that a new construction may emerge in its place. The old and the decrepit cannot be allowed to prevent, to delay the emergence of the new. It is in that sense that Time the Destroyer plays an indispensible part in this universe. Destruction is a role that has to be played as long as this universe is in the shadow of Ignorance. It is because of this ignorance, because of the sense of separativity as a result of ignorance that periodical destruction becomes necessary. And that is why Death is described as a process of life. Death does not stop life, life is eternal and death is a process by which it renews its forms. Similarly, the Kala Purusha helps the growth of consciousness in the universe by periodically striking down what stands in the way. And as long as we are imperfect, as long as we hug to our imperfections, the hammer descends on us. It is the law that suffering and pain have to be undergone before we qualify for the joys and the happiness of Heaven.

Here, Sri Aurobindo makes the famous statement that "the debt to Rudra must be paid before the Law of Vishnu

can prevail." The debt to Rudra the destroyer must be paid individually and collectively before the uninterrupted rule of God as Preserver can come. Elsewhere he expresses the same idea saying, before there can be dance of Brindavan, there has to be the Kali dance on the battlefield. He has the Kaurava and the Pandava war in mind. Sri Aurobindo underlines the truth that we have to learn as we grow in knowledge to regard destruction and construction with the same equal eye. There should be no shrinking, no running away from what is unpleasant. These are inevitable features in this struggle for existence, struggle for perfection.

Second, it is not knowledge alone that can give us this equality of attitude, equality of vision. It is love, devotion to the Lord, "who is present in a whisper as in a whirlwind." We must learn to adore the Divine presence in what we call good and in what we blame as evil, it is only by love that we can have this attitude and that true love is when you cancel your ego and you give yourself without reserve to the object of your love, that is to the Divine Lord. Only when you have that consciousness, can you see that he is present everywhere and the attitude forms naturally. You do not have to mentally cultivate that attitude. Linkage with the Divine in all the three poises can be done only through unreserved surrender in love. Knowledge enlightens, action through sacrifice prepares but the culmination comes in Bhakti. This is what he assures Arjuna, after he has had the Vision: by adoring ME, by being in ME, thou shalt establish thyself in ME.

He points to all the soldiers and armies being devoured and blood trickling down from the lips, and says, you have seen that all these armies have been already killed by me. You are to be only the instrument, *nimitta mātram*. Even if

you do not slay, they are already slain. It is better that you do your duty and enjoy the opulent kingdom that is yours. It is not that you win that fruit by your labours, it is given to you.

Sri Aurobindo states elsewhere that the Kala Purusha, the Zeitgeist, chooses the instruments through whom his force acts. They may delude themselves saying that they are powerful and they have achieved, as Napolean did. But the fact is that it is this Time-Spirit that rushes to fulfil its purpose through whatever instruments, whether they are weak, whether they are middling or whether they are strong. It makes them fit, it makes them the channel.

Someone asked, how do we meet evil? We have to function in terms of a very graphic phrase which calls upon us to think globally but act locally. That is, you have the large principle that should govern your attitude, but on the spot you have to do what you have got to do, if you have to kill, you kill, if you have to save, you save. But when you kill, when you fight evil, you should not have hatred in your heart; a very difficult proposition. Yet, to recognise God as Destroyer and be his instrument, necessarily requires that you have no hatred in your heart, Sri Aurobindo says you should have love in your heart, kill with love. I do not know whether this is possible for any human being but still it is possible not to hate. We kill mosquitos, we kill harmful insects, not that we hate them but as a necessity of life. Similarly, in battles the armies of the right have to put down the armies of the wrong. Pandavas have to fight and exterminate the Kauravas. But they have to do this as an imperative imposed by God to eliminate those who are standing in the way of progress, way of the establishment of the rule of the right. Because

of this gigantic task Lord Krishna had to incarnate, to inspire the heroic manhood of the age to enter upon this manslaughter of a colossal kind. The Kaurava society was a decadent society, all standards had weakened. There was everywhere moral corruption and the time had come for a decisive change. The Dwapara Yuga had to yield to the Kali Yuga. An Avatar had to appear who could move the representative Princes of heroic Kshatriyahood to exterminate the hosts of evil, injustice and falsehood. Whether they followed Lord Krishna's injunction and killed without hatred is more than I can say. But the fact is, ultimately, hardly any were left to enjoy the fruits of the Battle. But that is a matter which concerns Time the Destroyer and not the petty human instruments.

The essential message of the Visva Rupa Chapter is the role of Lord as Time and Destroyer. He has spoken enough as friend of the peoples, Lord of Nature, Lover of devotees. We have here the picture of the Lord as Time. It requires a certain objectivity to look at these things without reference to oneself, one's own pet notions, samskaras.

37. Way of Fulfilment

In the traditional approach to yoga or to spiritual quest, at the time of the Gita, there was always a call for a life of austerity, self-denial and attainment of the Impersonal, the Immutable Brahman and eventually to merge oneself in that Reality. That was the general drift current in that age. It is the Gita, as we have seen that marks a clean departure from this trend of other-worldliness so characteristic of the traditional paths.

In the first place, the Vedanta devalues activity, works. They clearly say that works lead to involvement in the transitory concerns of life. Still, one has to work by compulsion and it is wise for the seeker to utilise works as means for purification of the self. And once the realisation takes place, works are clearly dispensed with, except perhaps rituals concerned with the worship, adoration of the Lord. Either way, works occupy a temporary inferior position. But Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna an illumined way of action so that works themselves become a means for attaining union with the Divine. Instead of being impediments, they become sanctified means for uniting with the Divine.

Next, the Vedantic tradition speaks of different types of realisation, union, each exclusive of the other. You can have any one of them; for instance by knowledge, by *jnāna*, detaching from the fleeting movements of the world occupying the position of a witness, gradual dissociation

from the world, you unite with the pure, uninvolved, detached Self. That is union with the Self or the Brahman (which are the same), *sāyujya*. Sayujya mukti is the liberation in union, nothing else is left. The Vishishta Advaita of Ramanuja, holds that it is blasphemous for a human being to aim at merging in the Divine, they are two different things. At best you can come close, very near, *sāmipya*, or you can live in the same world, the same status of consciousness, *sālokya* and have relationship with the Lord but not union. Then there is the yoga of Works by which you purify yourself, train yourself and acquire such a perfection of your nature that it acquires the same quality as the Divine nature. This is likeness *sādrishya*. You cannot have likeness with God but likeness with the nature of God, those qualities, those modes of these possible realisations. You can have one. But the Gita is unique in pointing out the possibility of having multiple realisations. By works you have *sādrishya* and by acquiring a status of consciousness which is the same as that of the Transcendent Lord, the Purushottama, you have the *sālokya*. It is possible to have these different types of liberation. By knowledge which sees behind the appearances of things to the truth behind things, you can unite with the Truth, *sāyujya*. In the scheme of the Gita, these do not exclude each other, they can be simultaneous, they can be realised by the same person.

Having understood this instruction by Lord Krishna, Arjuna gets a legitimate doubt. He says, there are those who by detachment arrive at union or identity with the Immutable Brahman; then you speak of the possibility of always surrendering oneself to you, merging one's mind in you and living in you. Now which of these is greater? He

has a doubt whether worship, devotion and identification with the Lord in the heart and the mind is greater or the withdrawal resulting in identification with the Immutable is greater. Lord Krishna answers unequivocally. He says, whether you pursue the path of withdrawal, asceticism, leading to the Immutable Brahman or you develop your devotion, faith and understanding to the point of always living in me, in my consciousness, both are the same, the Purushottama consciousness and the Immutable Brahman consciousness, are both the same, they are different poises of the same Reality. He points out that the traditional path of withdrawal, self-denial, asceticism, narrowing oneself, is a hard and difficult path in which only a few succeed in arriving at the goal. If that is one's temperament, if that is one's call, well, you follow it. Otherwise the synthetic way of devotion, of knowledge and of works, with love as the crown of the triple path is more natural.

What then should a man do? That is the implied question of Arjuna? Naturally, nobody wants a difficult path. Lord Krishna tells him: you place your mind in me and whatever work you do, consecrate it and do it as an offering to me, all the while taking care to link yourself with me. If, however, you find it difficult to keep your mind always fastened on me, then meditate, meditate on me. Think of me, uniting yourself in me in your mind, dwell upon me in your meditation; true, it is not going to be an even path, there are always your senses, other attractions and distractions and there will be dry periods, ups and downs, but you have to persist, *abhyāsa*. Abhyasa is repeating again and again the same practice, the same experience, trying to evoke it again and sustaining your effort till it becomes natural. Even if that is not possible, pursue the

way of knowledge. When you look at things do not stop with the appearances, go behind to the truth of things. Once you perceive the truth, concentrate upon it so that by your sheer concentration you melt into the truth. The Lord is so compassionate that he takes the human frailties into account and presents alternatives. Even if concentration is not possible, if works as sacrifice is not possible, dwelling upon the Lord in the mind is not possible, he says, give up the fruits of works to me. Do whatever you like but offer the fruits of works to me. Do not desire a particular fruit for your labour. Once you make it a habit of not looking to the fruit of things — ultimately they belong to the Lord or to the Master of Works — you will develop a certain equality. Whatever success or failure, right or wrong results, well, it is all the Lord's, you are not bothered. You develop a certain serenity of mind and a calm settles on you. The consciousness of the Godhead grows in you in that calm. You have the impulsion to offer your devotion, your emotions. It comes naturally, it does not come by instruction in the scriptures but by itself. And when there is this free movement or flow of the heart towards the Lord, that is the secure ground for growth in him. So, ultimately even for a person who is very weak in will, who cannot pursue the strenuous paths for long, abandonment of the fruit of works but with joy, not with a sense of personal loss but joyous, is the way.

Arjuna asks, how are we to recognise the person who arrives by this route to your consciousness, who is held in your Being? The Lord answers that the one sure sign is, he is always equal; not equanimity but equality. In equanimity you bear whatever comes without complaint, but equality is more positive. You return the same response to success

or failure, to the right and the wrong, the high and the low, you have the same equal attitude, because you see the divinity behind, however deformed, however perverted in expression. This equality gives a peace and this peace is not anything personal. True peace can never be personal, it always flows. A person who has an established peace oozes out that peace in his surroundings. People in his environs imbibe those vibrations of peace. He is concerned with the well-being and the welfare of all in the world. He has no enemies, others may consider him to be an enemy, treat him as an enemy, but he has no enemies. He has no preferences. He looks at all from the angle of the Divine vision. such a person is one who dwells in that higher consciousness. The love that he embodies flows from him to all impartially. Of course there are gradations of love, according to the grade of consciousness that one lives in.

Only such a person is qualified to arrive at the Dharma of Immortality. As long as you are in the realm of ignorance, subject to the limitations of body, life and mind in their sphere of untruth and ignorance, there are many standards, conflicting, always cancelling each other, bewildering to one who wants to know what is the Dharma, as Arjuna was confused. But the higher you rise into the consciousness of truth or you are open to the vibrations of Truth, you realise that superceding all the Dharmas there is only one Dharma because there is only one Truth. The true Dharma is the working of the Truth. And that Truth is the Truth of Immortality, of conquest over all deformation and limitation. That is the acme of realisation. And in that Dharma you realise your inmost nature. Just as the inmost being is the soul, which is a spark of Divine, the

inmost nature is also a projection of the divine nature in the individual frame. Soul and nature, even at a human level, are at their core projections of Divine's Being and Divine Nature.

In developing this teaching, the Lord arrives at a living synthesis of works which lead you to *sādrishya*, of knowledge which leads you to *sāyujya* and of devotion melting into love leading you into *sāmipya* and *sālokya*. It covers the entire possibility open to the human being turning towards God. That is a more natural, more fruitful, more healthful and more fulfilling way than the narrow way of self-cancellation that had been in vogue till then.

Further on the Gita proceeds to underline and explain and clarify the various principles of existence. So far it has been the process of things but the principles which work in the processes, they are developed in the Third Part of the Gita which we shall now study.

38. The Field and the Knower

Arjuna is given detailed instruction regarding the Way of Works he is to follow. He has been brought to appreciate the necessity of works in the spirit of sacrifice, knowledge of the principles involved and the way the spirit of devotion develops into love. At the time of Lord Krishna and the Gita, devotion had not yet been turned into a science as it was done later in the Vaishnava School, the various precise stages through which it has to pass through, the different ways of expression etc. Arjuna learns that the essence of love for God is to live in God whom you love. It is not so much the way you express, the terms in which you speak to God but how you live your life in the consciousness of your ideal of the Godhead who is dear to you. That is the key. The key of this triple path is one of loving self-surrender. There is no element of self-deprivation, no ascetic note, but a joyous movement of giving oneself in all the parts of the being, not merely in the heart which is the originating centre but in all the parts of being. This integrality of the spirit of devotion is underlined in order that Arjuna may be inspired to work and fight in what we may call the "Krishna-consciousness".

Arjuna has heard all the instructions of the Master and intelligent that he is — he is the representative of humanity — he wants to know what exactly is the relation between the field of action, Nature, Prakriti and the Purusha, the Soul. He has been exposed to a double interpretation.

There is the Lower Nature, Prakriti as we call it, and a Higher Nature; the Higher Nature is a power of Brahman, a power of the Purushottama. Similarly, the Purusha, the Master, the one who enjoys Nature, who receives the offering of Nature, has more than two dimensions. It has been explained that there is first the Master in the heart of every being, *hridayastha*, he who is stationed in the heart of creatures, he enjoys. Second, as one withdraws from helpless involvement in the movements and activities of Nature, one gets into a certain calm, peace which deepens into an impersonality. The impersonal Self is experienced as something supporting, sustaining the whole movement in the Universe, but not involved in it. This leads to a feeling of separation, a feeling of inferiority of the life-movement. Lest he take it as the sole truth, Lord Krishna hastens to tell him that this immutable Self not only supports and sustains in its static poise but in its dynamic station it also participates. It becomes the Jiva, multiple Jiva. Wherever there are forms, wherever there are creatures it deposits itself as a spark. So there are multiple Purushas. The immutable Brahman becomes the multiple Jiva and participates in the creation. And that is not everything. Above the individual Self, above the Universal Self in its static aspect and dynamic aspect, there is yet another in its transcendent aspect. The individual Purusha relates himself to the Transcendent through the immutable Purusha, the Brahman.

These are the various dimensions of the Self and Nature. So, Arjuna wants to know what precisely is their relation. Lord Krishna tells him that this knowledge of what is the field, *kshetra* and who is the *kshetrajna*, the Knower of the Kshetra, the field, the enjoyer, is important.

He is told that one has to acquire knowledge, not of the Soul alone, of the Nature alone or Nature versus Soul, but Soul and Nature, because both Soul and Nature have the same origin in the Supreme Reality. Both of them have no beginning, no end.

And how do you acquire that knowledge? Certainly not from books. There are ways of acquiring this knowledge, an integral knowledge of Soul and Nature, of world and God, the individual and the universal and the linkage with the Transcendent. This knowledge can be got first by meditation. You release yourself from entanglements of your mind in a thousand directions in the affairs of the world, turn for a moment, for a while your gaze inward, that is, introvert your gaze; you quieten the mind, the mind which is geared into an actively receptive poise. In a meditation of this kind which is intended to acquire or receive knowledge, it cannot be a passive meditation. Silence, quietude to begin with; but side by side there has to be a seeking, an aspiration, a surrendered aspiration. And when the mind is in that state, something of the knowledge that is aspired for is reflected. We have known that mind does not construct knowledge, mind is not a discoverer of knowledge but a reflector of knowledge. So, the mind reflects; you cogitate whatever you receive during your period of meditation, you dwell upon it, assimilate it, integrate it. This is what is meant by following up the meditation. A follow-up of meditation is more important than actual meditation. Otherwise it is a loss, not a total loss but a loss; you begin again at the same point. But if you assimilate, you take care to turn the knowledge you receive in meditation into a dynamic and an active factor in life. This is the way of meditation for knowledge.

If one is not endowed with an intellectual mould to acquire knowledge, there is the method of the Sankhyas; you separate the Purusha from the Prakriti. The body may do things, the mind may think but all the while you learn the art of separating your central Self from this activity. And once you separate yourself, you watch as a witness, *sāksi*, assume this poise of a witness. Gradually there is a dissociation and the soul or the individual Purusha finds itself turned either inwards or upwards and gets linked with the Source of knowledge.

Even if that is not possible, Arjuna is told, you have the Way of Works; everyone has to do something, it is the Law of Life. Works do not mean only physical activity, but output of energy on any level. You weave a structure of emotions and impose it on a person or on the world, that too is work. You think, conceive of things, speculate, you pour your mental energies in a particular direction; all these are types of works. They should be done as a sacrifice, as an offering, as a consecrated giving to the Master of Works.

Sri Aurobindo points out again and again and the Mother affirms, that it is not actual work, the output of work, the quantity that you turn out that is important but the spirit, the attitude with which you do the work. What is important is whether you do it as a duty which has somehow to be done, or you look upon it as a means of asserting yourself, your ego, of acquiring power, dominion, influence or you welcome it as a privilege, as an opportunity to let your being and energy flow towards the Lord through the instrumentation of activity. If you succeed in having the right attitude, do the work in the right spirit of consecration, that opens the door for an identification with the Master of the Being.

Even if that is not possible, — Lord Krishna has a very good understanding of human frailties and he gives a long rope — then you learn from others. You learn from him who is competent to give you that knowledge. He is the Guru, the Teacher. If you are fortunate to be near a Teacher who is in possession of that knowledge and, what is more important, who can transmit that knowledge to you, not mentally but through his consciousness, well, that is another way of learning from another. And he is careful to point out that to learn from another is only the first step, a preparatory step, which has to be followed by casting your life in the mould of the knowledge that you receive. You have to restructure your life in terms of what you are taught. That is the test of your sincerity and measure of your readiness.

These are the different ways in which this high knowledge is to be acquired. The Kshetra, Arjuna is told, is the body. Sri Aurobindo is careful to add that it does not mean only the physical body that you see, it is the body which contains the life-energy that drives it, the mind, the emotions that are active in it, the spirit that is inherent in it. So this composite structure whose external appearance is the physical body, is the field. And this field, Kshetra is not confined to your own body but to the extended body in the universe. The Universal Kshetra and the personal Kshetra are really one. As long as you live on the surface, caught up in the superficials, you think they are different. But once you in-draw yourself, you find these distinctions are very flimsy. The Universal Self and the Individual Self are one. The universal field and the individual field are the same.

The Kshetrajna, the Purusha who takes cognisance of what goes on in the Kshetra, the field, who takes the

enjoyment is the Lord himself. My soul, your soul, they are individualisations of that Purusha who oversees the whole movement. The one who cognises this truth of things, who draws enjoyment is the Divine Purusha. He is the same whether in my individual frame or in the universal frame.

He has a still higher station, taking the delight of all that goes on in the universal movement of his own power. True, the individual Purushas of which we are aware, — our ego-self or external self, — do not have that sense of enjoyment. That is because we are lost in the deformations of the workings of Nature. But he draws the universal delight through all these dualities. The dualities of pain and pleasure, good and evil, are permitted by the Master of the Being to educate the evolving soul, to teach it to grow through the contraries which give an incentive to the individual to exceed them. So, it is only by detaching oneself, identifying oneself with the overseeing Purusha that one can truly participate in the Cosmic enjoyment of Nature.

Then the Gita goes in detail to explain, what does this field, Prakriti, Kshetra, consist of. It follows the Sankhyan analysis: the great and the impersonal energy *Mahat* and then the *Ahankāra*, the ego-sense, then the ten *Indriyas* — Jnanendriyas and the Karmendriyas, the objects of the senses, Buddhi, understanding, the mind, the sixth sense, — all these usual Sankhyan classifications of the constituents of Nature are described. But care is taken to emphasise that they do not exhaust the creative movement. There are many poises of the Purusha to be experienced, realised and this knowledge has to be a whole knowledge, a total knowledge which does not erect an artificial barrier between Soul and Nature but sees the Soul in terms of Nature and Nature in terms of the Soul. It is only in this context of

both as self-formations of Brahman in his move for manifestation, that knowledge has the true perspective of the Kshetra and the Kshetrajna. It has an individual context, a universal context and both at a certain level cohere, become one.

Knowledge of only one movement, one aspect is a limited knowledge and to that extent it is prone to error. The knowledge has to grow. It can grow by itself on the urge of the soul. On the urge of the Spirit within, knowledge may reveal itself. That also is possible in very rare cases. Without external help, without meditative exercises, without Sankhyan analysis, knowledge may just flow by itself. I suppose that is a culmination of an effort that has been put in one of the previous lives. Because we have seen our one life is not everything. There is a long chain of lives earlier, even as there is an unlimited future with a choice to us to participate in it or to withdraw from it. That choice is given to each individual soul.

39. Above the Gunas

The Gita has explained at sufficient length the relation between Soul and Nature: they are not two alien entities, Nature is a power of the Soul. Nature has got different gradations. When it functions in knowledge, it is Shakti and when in ignorance, it is Prakriti. The Gita has also brought out the difference between the Soul which stands above involvement in Nature. It has emphasised that to stand above Nature is indispensible for any kind of liberation. But once you disentangle yourself from the compulsive activities of Nature, you find your status in an impersonal Reality or the impersonal Brahman; you stay in that calm, peace, which means there is no pull to participate in the activities of Nature.

The Gita points out that this is not the final status, it is only an intermediate status because supporting the Impersonal, supporting the Akshara is the Purushottama, the Transcendent. The next step after arrival at the Impersonal is to elevate yourself into the poise of the Transcendent, the Purushottama. It is then alone that you are truly liberated. And there is no aversion to action, no special attraction to action nor aversion, because you realise that both Kshara and Akshara, the Mutable and the Immutable, are but complementary aspects of the Purushottama. It is only when you arrive at this status of the Purushottama that your nature is sufficiently purified, subtlised, to put on the nature of the Lord. This is Sadharmya Mukti, liberation

into likeness of nature. We spoke the other day of different types of liberation but here it is liberation into the likeness of divine nature, from human nature to divine nature. It is possible only in that status. That means at one level you are engaged in activity; supporting it is the impersonal consciousness, the attitude of equality. And presiding over it is the Transcendent Consciousness.

Now how do you get beyond Nature? And why do you get involved in Nature? That is the question to which the Gita addresses itself in the Chapter "Above the Gunas". Nature, Prakriti functions through its modes. Modes means qualities. It is the qualitative action that keeps the Nature moving and going. And the knot which keeps on the activity is the knot of ego driven by desire. But both ego and desire have to act through these modes, which are the qualities of Nature.

Sri Aurobindo makes an observation, in this context, that the physical science, science of today, gives importance to quantity, quantity of atoms, quantity of molecules etc. But the ancients of India gave more importance to quality. It is the qualitative action that is more important, more decisive than the quantitative. The same number of things combined in different ways give different results. That is because of a qualitative difference. It is not that the ancients did not recognise the importance of quantity; he cites the importance they gave to *mātrā*, the quantity in metre in Poetry. To the ancients, quantity related to the objective side of things. Quality related to the idea and subjective side which is more important. The objective, after all, translates into action what the subjective conceives and puts forward. Thus it is the quality that is more important.

And what are these qualities? They are three: the quality of inertia, lethargy, immovability, Tamas, the quality of obscurity, darkness and ignorance. Then there is the quality of movement, dynamism, action, that is the kinetic energy, Rajas. The third is the quality of balance, of light, of harmony, Sattva. Now these three qualities Tamas, Rajas, Sattva, are never found single. It is only for the sake of understanding that we speak of this quality or that. Everywhere they are mixed, inter-linked. And that is a design of Nature because the concurrent action of all the three is necessary for its purpose.

Now, let us analyse. We said, Tamas is resistance to movement, proneness to status, reluctance to move, preference to stick, to stagnate in ignorance, in darkness (darkness means ignorance), not to move. Now that is the first quality in physical Nature. And that is on purpose because in this world of flux of forces, motion of forces constantly jostling, some stability is required before you can proceed further. And this stability is established, promoted and sustained by the quality of Tamas, which is rooted in inconscience. It holds things together, without letting them go haywire. At every step there is resistance. Even if by some discipline, you get over the tamasic quality, tamasic heritage, the universal Tamas sweeps over you and undoes all that you have done individually. It is Nature's way of guaranteeing stability. Every movement forward, every step forward has to be fought for, established. Again and again there is a pull-back but you resist it. And it is only when there is this condition of security that you can say you are stable and ready enough to go to the next step. So this quality of Tamas, inertia, darkness is indispensible.

Guaranteed that it is indispensible, can we stay shut in it? Nature will not allow it. Opposed to Tamas, Nature has the operation of another quality. And that is force, force of movement, drive, force of adventure; of this, desire is the motive force, and this desire organises itself around the ego. Ego is the driving force or the motivating force at the mental level, desire at the vital level. And in their mix both together keep things moving, they fight against Tamas. Tamas tries to pull them down but Rajas has always a drive. At times Rajas is swallowed by Tamas, at times Rajas suppresses Tamas. The element of desire pushes on and you get over Tamas, not that you conquer Tamas but you neutralise Tamas to the extent of getting freedom to your movement, your kinesis.

This constant warfare between Tamas and Rajas is everywhere. But Nature has a way of balancing them, of harmonising them. The more one evolves the more one emerges into some sort of order, there is a periodical balancing; now Tamas is more, now Rajas is more. On the whole there is a working balance and the mind falls into a kind of receptivity, an openness to light; there is the Sattva. Each quality does not exist by itself. There is a continuous inter-action, pressure of one over the others. Normally nobody is only tamasic, only rajasic or only sattvic. There is an inter-action, an inter-play and it depends upon one's moods; actually the moods also are influenced by which quality is preponderant at that time.

In the ancient system this qualitative action is ascribed, not only to the humans, but even to the Gods. Vishnu embodies Sattva, he is for stability. Brahma, the Creator, has to move in dynamism, he is Rajas. Rudra, the destroyer, represents Tamas. That means wherever there is creation,

these three qualities are in action. Nature teaches man how to utilise them for his own progress, whether it is in matters of food, habits, or pattern of life. If you are habitually tamasic, dull, lethargic, tending to sleep at the least provocation, you adopt a discipline by which the rajasic element is encouraged. You correct the excesses of Tamas by the introduction of an extra element of Rajas. If you are always on the move, on the go, if you feel restless unless you are engaged in something, never stable, then on one side Tamas pulls you down but on the other side there is element of balance, the element of light that controls Rajas. You adopt a discipline to expose this restless activity to the light of the mind, to the action of Sattva. There has to be an intelligent combination, at varying stages of life, of these three modes.

If these three modes constitute the entire operation of Nature, does it mean that the Soul is always destined to be enslaved to the action of these Gunas? The Gita says, no. You withdraw, and observe the action of the Gunas. Do not involve yourself but watch it. This act of witnessing and observing is the first step of detaching yourself. Thereafter activity goes on, no doubt, because action is a law of Life but you have the awareness that what is working is the action of the Gunas and not yourself. On the surface of your being the Gunas go on working. You have arrived at a stage when you can separate your soul or consciousness from the inevitable action of the Gunas. Naturally you stand aloof, but that is only an intermediate station. Supporting the witness position, supporting the impersonal Reality, the impersonal Self, is the Lord, the Purushottama.

And how do you get there? First you abandon the fruits of works, because your seeking and leaping towards

the fruit is what makes you work. You abandon desire for the fruits, let the Will of the Lord be. Even if that is not enough, you consecrate the works themselves. Whatever work comes you do it without personal involvement, it is to be done and as a sacrifice. Even that is not enough. You detach yourself from desire for the fruit of action, you surrender action. There has to be, accompanying these steps, the heart's devotion to the Lord. You cannot really surrender to the Lord, offer your work unless you have some feeling, unless you feel he is the Master of your being and the Lord of existence. So what starts as an element or a current of devotion develops, as you participate in it sincerely, into adoration and then culminates in love, love for God, love for the Lord, love for the Master.

Love is a great dissolvent. Mother says that love is the greatest force in creation. When you arrive at this stage, the dissolving action of love, self-giving love, cancels all the vestiges of the Gunas, Tamas, Rajas or Sattva. Sri Aurobindo points out that even Sattva has a way of imprisoning you. The way Tamas holds you back is obvious. The prison that Rajas weaves around you is also patent. But not all are aware that Sattva also is a cage, a golden cage, nevertheless a cage. And it promotes, as he mentions elsewhere, a sattvic ego. This is the last ego to be broken. You have to break out of the prison of the sattvic Guna; your nature which has risen above the action of the three Gunas, becomes one with the divine nature.

Thus you have the Sadharmya Mukti, which the Gita considers to be the most decisive liberation that is open to the human soul. Now this liberation into likeness of nature does not mean that you turn your back on the world. You participate but fully aware that your nature is playing an

instrumental part, it is the divine nature that is acting through you. You are only a channel, you are not even an instrument but a channel through which that Shakti flows. When this movement takes place you are securely lodged in the divine nature and you are above the Gunas.

The point is, each Guna has a part to play. Singly and jointly, they prepare the being; once their role is over, it is time for the human soul to liberate itself from enslavement by the Gunas and in a spirit of devotion — Bhakti, surrender, cast its nature in the mould of divine nature. Indeed, the soul is always one with the Divine; it is nature that is different, that creates a distance and a wall, but when that nature also begins to participate in the likeness of the divine nature, the liberation is complete.

So, from the first step to the last, the Gita traces how keeping one's presence in the world, engaging oneself in the activities of Nature, with this difference — difference of attitude, difference of approach, difference of motivation — it is possible to radiate a divine nature and manifest it on earth.

This is a complete analysis of the role of the Gunas, the necessity of transcending them and the possibility of using them for one's own evolution, for one's own liberation by an intelligent manipulation in individual life. That means a good deal of observation, objective observation and adjusting the dosage, as I would say, of the different Gunas, qualitative actions in one's daily life.

40. The Three Purushas – I

The theme today is of the Three Purushas. We have covered considerable ground on the subject during our earlier discussions of the two Prakritis and the three poises of the Transcendent. This is, in a way, a kind of recapitulation of the philosophy of the three Purushas.

Naturally, we begin with our world where we are, the realm of Prakriti, Prakriti governed by ignorance, ruled by ego. In this world, the Gita announces, is a play of the Spirit. There is a mighty Universal Spirit at sway in this Universe acting through Nature. Nature has her own instrumentation and the Spirit spreads itself in a million centres which we call the Jivas and develops relations with each other, organises the life-movement, not directly but through Nature. Nature, however, is not conscious of this driving Spirit behind. That is why it is called Prakriti, sunk in ignorance, liable to be driven by forces which are not conscious, not directed by the Spirit. Because of this gulf between the awareness of Nature and the Spirit behind, there is disharmony, conflict, friction, pain, evil and suffering in our world. Where you are cut off from your source and live on the surface, that is what happens. And the world goes round and round.

That is why many of the ancient traditions convict this world of futility, always turning without a purpose; it is best to reject the world. But the Gita insists on treating this world as real, not as an illusion, not as a product of

Maya but as an embodiment of the Spirit. It maintains that the Kshara also, — the mobile, the mutable spirit spreading itself in this world — is the Purushottama. The Gita emphasises that the Kshara also is divine but divine in its Source, divine at an inner level whatever may be the appearance at the surface; it is directed, overseen, governed by the Spirit.

If we can detach our vision from the external superficialities and become conscious of the inner layers of our being, we can see that there is something else which is not transitory, which is not changing, which is permanent. And that supports the Kshara, this movement of the mutable. This poise of the Spirit not in movement, which is immutable, impersonal, is the Akshara. The Gita makes it very clear that the Akshara, impersonal, immovable Reality is not opposed or contrary to the Kshara. In fact, Kshara is possible because of the support it enjoys from the Akshara. So both the Kshara and the Akshara are complementaries, not contradictories. The Akshara supports the Kshara. And when one withdraws in some part of the consciousness from involvement in the Kshara, one has the experience of that calm, peace and a sense of something eternal. And that is the first door of escape, if you treat it that way, or a door opening into another realm of life.

For those of the ancient tradition who treated this world as a product of illusion, Maya, the Akshara, the Immutable, was the goal. It is true that once you are in that status, poise of consciousness, all this movement, constant change from moment to moment, looks like froth and bubbles with no reality of its own. Ultimately it comes to nothing. So it appears as if the world is not real; what is real is this state of eternal peace and joy, serenity; the moving world

is Maya. And they hasten to come to the conclusion that it is a falsehood or a secondary formation which loses its value and reality the moment you step into a higher dimension.

The Mother also points out that if you go deeper or a little higher, you very well see that what you thought the world to be is not true; it is something else. The Vedantins stopped at this position that what appears is not real, it has no meaning. Mother says, — and it is supported by the Gita, — that what is false, what convicts itself of falsity is your picture of the world. The world, as it is, has its own reality which you miss when you concentrate your vision on the surface. When you go deep, when you look with another vision, everything on earth reveals a different significance, a different truth of its existence. You realise that the appearance of illusion is in your mind, what you thought falls down when you see the world as it is, bereft of the formations of Maya. And what is Maya? Maya, at its lower levels of functionings, is a power of the Spirit subjecting itself to the play of the Gunas. It is playing the part of an ignorant power. But once you rise above the mutable level, you see the same power in its higher dimension, it is a direct power of the Spirit.

The question arises whether for liberation resort to this Immutable, the Akshara, is not the easiest way. That is true if your soul will allow you to take that path. Every soul, every jiva has a destiny. The Divine gives freedom to everyone to choose his goal. Some choose to obliterate themselves defeating the intention in Nature. But once you see that the world is not what you thought it to be, the door opens to a still greater truth. You realise that even the Akshara, even the Immutable, is not the final goal.

With all its compulsive overwhelming impact on your mind, you begin to realise that the Akshara also is only a step. Kshara was a step, Akshara is the second step, both of them leading to still another, a third step. And that is the status of the Purushottama, the One of whom both the Kshara and the Akshara are two sides. This Purushottama is called variously, the Uttama Purusha, the Transcendent, the One, who assumes these positions for his manifestations.

And it is when this awareness of the Supreme Purusha who is above both the Kshara and the Akshara dawns on the consciousness of the human being that all the knowledge, all the works that have been done, combine to produce a flow of the Soul, a devotion, a loving adoration of the Supreme. So, it is when you are on the threshold of the Purushottama, above both the Kshara and the Akshara that there is a revolution in your consciousness. You begin to relate yourself to the Purushottama through this chord of love. You cannot help it, you bow down in adoration, your knowledge results in your recognising him as the Master of your being. You see the true principles of this world existence.

You also realise the truth of the Advaita position when you detach yourself from the Kshara and retire, however temporarily, in the poise of the Akshara where there is the Impersonal and the Immutable. You feel that is the only true thing. All these multiple movements of the universe, have no meaning, they do not stand scrutiny when you are one with the Brahman as the Immutable. That is the Advaita. But you are also an individual. There is the Jiva, the Soul which is a spark of God that does not die, it cannot die because it is a portion of the Immortal Being. The

Soul within insists on having relations with the Supreme. There is a relation and this possibility of conscious relation, awareness of link between oneself and the Supreme Master is what gives rise to the Vishishta Advaita, qualified Monism. The Lord is there, he is the Reality; but this also is true, a relation is possible. So you qualify Monism to a certain extent.

And when as a result of this realisation you put on the divine Nature, the Nature of the Purushottama, that, says the Gita, is the Supreme Revelation, not detachment and merger in the Immutable Brahman but staying where you are, experiencing at one level the impersonal consciousness, involved at another level in the active dynamism of the Universe and both together participating in the divine Nature which has both for its complementary sides. That is liberation because there in the supreme liberation of likeness to the divine nature, Sadharmya Mukti, you ignore nothing, you exclude no part of the Divine's manifestation. You do not arrogate to yourself a superior position to the Kshara which is itself a form and a movement of the Eternal.

The Isha Upanishad particularly brings this fact to the fore, it holding that knowledge and ignorance, oneness and multitude, mortality and immortality, are not opposites but complementaries. No knowledge is true, no knowledge is total, unless it embraces both. The Isha goes even to the extent of saying that if you ignore, refuse to participate in the movement, maybe a movement of ignorance and shut yourself only in the light of knowledge, you are entering into a greater darkness. It is only when you participate in both the movements, the double movement of ignorance and knowledge, of mortality and immortality, that you

qualify to participate in the divine Nature. And in divine Nature you see both these movements as one leading to the other, one presiding and helping and supporting the other. This, says Sri Aurobindo, is Purna Advaita, true integral Monism which does not admit any fissure, any break in the total integral Being of God. It is our mind that bisects, this as true and that as not true. Our limited mind exceeds its brief and ascribes its own limitation to the divine Nature. What God has made whole the human intelligence divides into the true and not the true, into the real and the false; they are only degrees of the Reality. Even ignorance is knowledge in preparation. The first step is always ignorance, nobody is born with full knowledge. It is through the winding routes of ignorance that you arrive at the threshold of knowledge. And having arrived at knowledge, it is incumbent on you to come back to the territory ruled by ignorance and enlighten it, set right the dispositions, the disharmonies caused by blind ignorance. You have to restore what ignorance has separated. It is only when you see the manifestation as a whole that you can breathe the consciousness of the Purushottama. It is also then that the Trimarga, the three routes of progress, knowledge, works and love synthesise, come together because they intermingle and produce the harmony, the rhythm that is celestial.

Note that each one of us is the three Purushas. We are actually aware of none. We are aware at the moment only of our pseudo-self, ego-purusha. The first step is to become aware of the Purusha that is within, it is the easiest. He is a portion of God. He is the Immortal in mortals, the divine Guest. The Veda says that he is a guest but Sri Aurobindo points out he is the occupant, he is the owner

of the house. And having stationed yourself in that status of the individual Divine, you spread out, identify yourself with the Universal Purusha, you do not lose your identity. You maintain your identity but you enjoy the universal poise. In the process of widening out, of identifying yourself with the Universal Purusha, you also look upward. And that is the Supreme Purusha who is always there overhead supporting both our front of ignorance, the self of equality and knowledge, overseeing everything.

To realise the Three Purushas is the meaning of the Integral Yoga. The foundations have been laid in the Gita and Sri Aurobindo has added more dimensions to it.

41. The Three Purushas – II

I was telling someone that the Three Purushas of the Gita have a way of prolonging themselves and they do not leave us. Today I hope this will be the last talk on the Three Purushas and their role in this cosmic manifestation. First, the Gita speaks of the eternal Ashwattha Tree; this tree stands for cosmic existence. Our Cosmos, the graded worlds that constitute the terrestrial Cosmos, is symbolised in the Gita by the Ashwattha Tree. You know it is a mighty tree with a great trunk and hundreds of branches. What is special about this Ashwattha Tree in the Gita is that it has its roots *above*. All trees, as we know, have their roots in earth but this one has its roots above. This recalls to our mind a very important expression in Rig Veda where the Rishi speaks of *upari budhne* — with foundation above. The same idea is repeated here, *ūrdhva mūlam; ūrdhva* is high, *mūlam* is the root. The source of this Cosmic Existence is above and not here. And then it says this tree with its thousands of branches spreads itself all over and it plunges its roots, that is the branches, into the earth below. These branches represent the desires, attachments, sense objects and worldly movements which keep us tied to earthly life. The leaves of this tree are the Vedic hymns. Naturally Veda is taken in the sense of a sacrificial ritual. And the poet says that he who knows these leaves of the tree is called the Veda-knower; the Veda is a book of sacrifice giving fruits of enjoyment on earth and in other

worlds. The leaves of this tree relate to objects of enjoyment and the techniques and the ways of invoking the help of the gods for this fulfilment.

And it is in this context that you will appreciate the Gita's censuring the Vedas earlier where it speaks of *veda vāda ratāh* — those who indulge in the Vedic doctrine of sacrifice. Naturally sacrifice is taken in a very external sense. Now this tree symbolises the cosmic existence and its roots, that is its attachments, desires, passions, are all plunged deep into the inconscient. That is why it is not easy to cut across them. But the Gita counsels that if you want to get free from these entanglements — the human being is always entangled in the web of these movements — it has to transcend the operation of the Gunas, which characterise the movements of the universe.

You have, as a first step, to turn your gaze inward, upward and assume the witness position, stand above the play of the Gunas and you find yourself in a status of an immovable, impersonal consciousness. That is the Akshara Brahman, the Immutable Reality. When you are there you observe the things that are going on but you are not involved. And that is liberation, as in some lines of discipline, from the terrestrial existence of this world. Logically, Sri Aurobindo observes, that Sannyasa, abandonment of works, should be a quicker route. Instead of watching disinterestedly, why not abandon, give up works, turn your gaze away from the Kshara, the mutable? They assume that the Reality is only in the Akshara, only in the Immutable. What is Kshara, what is in movement, is something either illusory or secondary and one who seeks the freedom of his soul has to reject that. This is a duality problem. These two things are separate, when you are in one you cannot be in the other. Now what is the solution!

The solution is to allow the experience to develop, to recognise that even the Akshara, even the Immutable Brahman, is not the ultimate. That also is a stage, an intermediary stage to a status which is above both. That is the Supreme Purushottama, Master of Existence, of whom both the Immutable and the Mutable are two poises. When you realise that, you see that both have a claim on your consciousness because the Divine is as much present in the Mutable, in the Kshara, as in the Immutable, the Akshara. The quality of consciousness may be different, but the Divine Reality, the Lord, the Master of Existence, the Purushottama, is present in both the statuses. You cannot assume that one is superior to another. In fact when you are in that consciousness, where you allow the knowledge of Purushottama to form itself in you, you realise that the Immutable or the Akshara is not really aloof. In a way it supports the movement, the Immovable supports the movement. The movement goes on, on the bosom of the unmoving. And in that sense Akshara is the basis for the Kshara.

To make the point more clear, the Gita goes on to enunciate that the Supreme Lord spreads himself as the Many, the multiple Jivas, in the Mutable existence. Maybe he does not do that directly but through his own Power, which is called Maya. There is a Maya of knowledge, a Maya of ignorance. Maya of ignorance is also the same Power working through the operation of the Gunas. Through the Maya the Supreme organises itself in multiple forms, multiple creatures. The Purushottama is present in every form, in every creature building up relations between themselves.

What is more important is that he stations himself in every individual. It is not that they are so many Jivas which are sparks from the Divine, but each individual is a unique

formation of the Supreme Reality. When you speak of the heart of creatures, heart naturally does not mean the physiological heart but the spiritual heart, either behind the centre of the chest or to the right of the chest as some yogis say. Anyway, the seat of the Lord in each individual is at the core of the Being and it is from there that relations are spelt out, everything is seen as a manifestation of the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo puts it so graphically in the *Savitri*, you see the gaze of the One through different forms. When you are awakened, you sense and realise the presence of the Divine Reality in every form.

So, these are the three poises, each of which is necessary, none is dispensable. Where there is manifestation, where there is a willed creation, there is a purpose and the purpose is to manifest the One in multiple forms, bringing out the many aspects of the One Reality. And individually there is a growth of consciousness. As you step from one grade to another, you are first in the hands of the Gunas, being driven hither and thither when you are completely lost in the movement of the Kshara. You awake, turn your gaze elsewhere, learn to station yourself in a witness poise, then allow the impersonal consciousness, the Akshara to settle in you and then you have a certain equality, equality of status, no subjection to ego, no drive of desire. But you are aware only of the Reality and if you choose to look outward it is the play of the Maya, Maya means not the power of illusion but, the clever power of formation.

And when the awareness of something more than the Akshara, more than the Immutable dawns on you, when you awake to the existence of the Purushottama who is the Soul of souls, Master of all existences, the Lord of all creatures, then all your knowledge acquires a different

dimension, a third dimension, not just the personal and the impersonal but the *supra*, which combines both the personal and impersonal as its two aspects, knowledge becomes more comprehensive. It comprehends two sides which may strike at our level as contradictory, as opposites. You realise their complementarity, that they are simultaneous aspects of the Supreme Reality. So this knowledge acquires a larger dimension and with that there is an awakening of the heart. The heart, the emotions pent up in the heart jump up in adoration, in worship of the Master of Existence, the Lord of Sacrifice, and there is an aesthetic fulfilment, not only a mental and intellectual but the side of beauty, of joy, of delight. All these give a totally different stamp to life.

When you recognise the existence of the Master of your life, Ruler of the Worlds, your will insists upon pouring itself in service of the Lord. So it is at this threshold and later that the three movements of knowledge, of works, of devotion, co-mingle and build a kind of composite personality of the seeker. You not only realise the triple nature of existence — the Mutable, the Immutable and the Supreme — but you also find synthesised the three movements of consciousness in yourself: knowledge, love and works.

All through, however, the Gita insists and Sri Aurobindo underlines, that certain changes in your attitude and approaches are indispensable. First is detachment. Unless you are detached you cannot be free. You may participate in activity but if you are attached to it, if you are involved in it to the extent that you cling to it, you are a prisoner. Even with spiritual activity, which is supposed to develop spiritual consciousness in your being, there is a way of getting attached to it. That is why many teachers, Gurus make

it a point to break this knot of attachment to a teaching, attachment to a work, attachment to any kind of movement under whatever label. They break it and they rejoice when the sadhak is free from that knot of attachment.

Whether it is J. Krishnamurti or Mother or Sri Aurobindo, we have seen in their lives how they were very particular that you should not be attached and if by chance you got attached, and if you were to be the object of Grace, then that very thing would be taken away from your hands. If you are not ready for the impact of Grace, you are allowed to continue. Attachment to ideas, mental formations, attachment to vital movements, attachment to physical habits, food, drink, are all veritable prisons. You have to repeatedly experiment and free yourself from these entanglements.

So, first detachment, and next, a determined elimination of the ego-element. There can be, as we have noted, many kinds of ego including a spiritual ego. That ego, in however subtle a form, has to be eliminated. Unless the ego goes, the real spiritual Self cannot come in, it is clouded, the passage is blocked. And once the drive and the preference of ego are not there, there comes the attitude of equality. Even on the supramental heights the Mother has it as an indispensable condition. I have told once before and I repeat today, how she was once asked by an American diplomat as to what are the characteristic signs by which we can recognise that here is a person who has the supramental consciousness? She said they are two: one, perfect equality — equality of being; second, error-free knowledge.

But now we are speaking of equality. Equality, indeed, means we are not to be affected by success or failure,

happiness or otherwise; but it also means, as it grows, an equal endurance, not a resigned acceptance but an endurance of experience of any kind with the same equality. That equality can come only when you touch the level of the Self. Possible, there can be a reflection of the Self in the mind and you have the feeling of equality: But you have to stabilise it, normalise it and deepen it till it gets a permanent standing on the level of the Self.

So, we have detachment, elimination of the ego, equality. And there is surrender. What is surrender? We have asked this many times and we have also answered that it is a surrender of your will, which is the fulcrum of your life-movements to the Will of God, the Higher Will. Everything proceeds according to a certain will; not to exercise personal will but to lay the will open to be led and governed by the Higher Will of God, — that is surrender. This surrender is on all levels of being, not just in the mind; it is a long process. Surrender itself is a sadhana, otherwise it is a word. The Gita says you have to surrender with all the attainments. They are surrendered and, in the measure of your surrender, there is a wave of delight and joy because you are no longer your human self. You blossom into an instrument of the Lord. You continue to work, continue to participate in the cosmic manifestation, Kshara is as real to you as the Akshara and you live on three levels: Purushottama, the Akshara and the Kshara. It is not successive but simultaneous. Logically they are one after another but in life, which is larger than logic, they are simultaneous. And the place where the three join is in the heart. This is where the individual Divine Inhabitant is seated. There is the junction of all these three movements. That is why Mother gives so much importance to the psychic awakening and to the psychic activisation of nature.

42. Deva and Asura

During our studies so far we have known how the Gita speaks of different stages of realisation of God, how even after reaching and settling in the consciousness of Purushottama Being, the call to action is there. One is called upon to act from the level of the Purushottama, the Supreme Transcendent. Elsewhere the Gita is unequivocal in stating that all action in this world is through the Gunas, the three modes of Prakriti, the Lower Nature. Whatever the activity, whatever the attitude, the action is performed by the three Gunas in their interaction. And these three Gunas, constituting as they do the Lower Nature, are vitiated by ignorance, centered round the ego driven by desire. Now how do we square this position of realising the Divine Consciousness and still having to act through the instrumentality of the modes of Lower Nature, which are infected by ignorance and falsehood? The Gita has an answer. It is pointed out that even the action of the Gunas is constituted, is run, however indirectly, by the Supreme. It is the Divine Consciousness that supports the play of the Gunas in which the individual is involved. It is through the inter-action and the inter-play of the Gunas that man evolves. And subjection to these Gunas, involvement in the play of the actions of these Gunas, is only a preparatory stage.

We have noted that behind the Lower Prakriti there is the Higher Prakriti, Para-Shakti, supporting it and these

Gunas, in a way, educate the individual. They are, as we know, the mode of inertia, lethargy, stability, immovability; the mode of kinesis, action, dynamism, adventure; the mode of balance, of light, of harmony, of order. The evolution of the individual Godward proceeds through a regulation of these three Gunas. Even for a realised person the action of these three Gunas has to be regulated. And how is that done? If originally there is a pervasion of Tamas, the quality of inertia, it is balanced by Nature, cured by the introduction of the quality of Rajas — kinesis, dynamism. This mutual inter-action of the quality of inertia, and the quality of action, movement, keeps the world going. And for one who wants to evolve further and not just accept to be driven by Nature, there is the third quality of Sattva, one of balance, of light, of equilibrium.

The Gita calls upon individual aspirant to so shape his nature that it is more and more governed by the quality of Sattva. So the culture of a person, of a society, is really governed by to what extent it is ruled by this quality of Sattva, the third mode. All upward effort towards the conquest of animality and the acquiring of a higher status towards God is governed by the extent to which one is able to substitute the rule of Tamas and Rajas by the reign of Sattva. Sattva has a large civilising influence, it refines human nature, turns the human nature towards light, knowledge, wisdom, harmony. And a worker, whatever his status in consciousness when he wants to work, has to see to it that his action is more and more governed by the light of the Sattva. There is a manipulation, a governance by the higher mode or working to the exclusion of the influence of the lower two modes. So in the very process of working there is a growth. For one who does not work at all there

is, of course, the illusion of progress in the sense that one does not move, one is not a prisoner of ignorant Nature but the other side of the fact is that he is sunk in Tamas. He goes back to the first stage. So let us take it that action which is necessary, which is unavoidable, is done progressively under the light of Sattva.

This subtlisation of consciousness in the direction of equilibrium, balance, is the meaning of the preliminary stages of spiritual life. That is where the Shastra comes in. The Gita says, govern your life by Shastra, not by passions, not by yielding to the original impulse of Tamas. And by Shastra, Sri Aurobindo explains, is meant not a codified law but a corpus of guidance which is a product of intuition, not a laboured intelligence, not a law enacted by a law-giver but what is received by an intuitive inspiration. Second, by experience, experience of the wise, experience of those who have ascended the stair of consciousness. And third, wisdom; wisdom is not knowledge; wisdom is the cream of experience and of knowledge. So these three factors, intuition, experience, wisdom, form the inalienable features of the Shastra, helping man to progress towards God, to move towards spiritualisation of his nature.

At this point the Gita draws attention to a broad division of human nature: those who by nature are inclined Godward are born with that nature which is prone to be good, kind, inclined to exert itself in improving relationships on the basis of affection and love, sharing, modest, humble, always looking to the bright side of things, always having humility. These are essentially the signs of a Sattvic culture, leading towards spiritual culture. This is called Godly or Daivic nature which moves towards harmony, progress, well-being, participating in the well-being of others.

Opposed to them are those who are habitually inclined to be cruel, malevolent, suspicious, harmful, spreading gossip, thinking and wishing ill of others, always on the destructive path. They are of Adaivic, un-divine nature. There is only one way of conquering and transmuting the un-divine nature and that is by acquiring control over the rajasic elements that constitute this nature by increasing the sattvic qualities. Now this division between the divine and the un-divine is not special to human nature. Of course, it does not obtain at the sub-human level, we cannot say that a particular animal is divine and another is un-divine.

As Sri Aurobindo says, the basis for this categorisation lies in the higher planes, the supra-physical planes where there is no evolutionary movement. They are typal, life is typal, set in a certain type. There are beings, influences, forces that are by nature Godward, tending towards unity, the good, the well-being of all. There are those who are reverse, who are on the other side. And among these un-divine elements there are three broad types. One is the Titan called the Asura, who has his origin largely in the higher vital; he wields power, he is highly mental; he is not undisciplined, he can be a master of tapas, he can do austerities which are very famous in our Puranas. All that he wants is to rule, to command, to exercise his influence; that is the Titan, the Asura, the highest type of the hostile beings which have ranged themselves against the upward effort of the world towards God.

The second, a little lower than the Asura, is the Rakshasa, the giant, a typical example of which is Ravana of ten heads. He is of the lower vital, embodying the passions, the violence and the greed of lower vital. When they speak of Ravana of ten heads, it does not mean that actu-

ally he had ten physical heads, it means he had ten different types of ego. A Rakshasa is an embodiment of a lower type of ego and he had it in ten different forms. Still lower is the Pishacha, the demon, whose habitation is the vital touching the physical, almost you can say the vital-physical. So, these are the three grades of the hostile beings who act and influence creatures on earth, with their knowledge or without their knowledge.

Certainly, they can act on us because some door is open in us to their action; by our movements of jealousy, anger, wickedness, we invite the action of the corresponding hostile beings from above and they work through those who are thus open. The fact of the divine and the undivine or the anti-divine is there in all traditions, names may be different but they are a standing fact. When Sri Aurobindo was asked how long would they oppose, how long would they last, he said that they would last till they were no longer required. They too fulfil a role in the movement of evolution by providing opposition to the Divine. They draw out the best in those who are devoted to the Divine, they bring out the hidden weaknesses, the hidden openings to Lower Nature in the human being. Their role is to expose the undivine corners, the anti-divine impulses in human beings. Not that the Divine has created them for that role.

You are familiar with Mother's account told in a symbolic manner. The Asuras were not created as Asuras. They are what are called in the older tradition the elder Gods. When the Supreme Creator wanted to manifest this universe, he put out from his Being four emanations who are the first Gods: Being of Truth, Being of Consciousness and Light, Being of Life and Being of Bliss, and these were

commissioned to build this manifestation in the image of the Divine. But somewhere on the line they developed a self-will; they asked themselves why they should carry his Will, why not work as they would want. They had that freedom because the Divine Law is one of freedom and each one went ahead totally regardless of the governing Central Will. The culmination was that the Being of Consciousness and Light became the Being of Nescience, Inconscience; the Being of Truth turned into the Being of Falsehood; the Being of Bliss turned into the Being of Suffering; the Being of Life into the Being of Death. It was at this stage when all these four Gods changed their character and turned totally un-divine and the Soul that was put out to manifest was in the danger of being lost that it sent out a cry, an S. O. S. to the parent Divine. In response a ray of Love came out and without passing through the intermediary levels went straight to the Soul and saved it. That was the first touch of Grace in creation. This was followed up by creating another batch of Gods, not only to redress the wrong turn given to the manifestation but to build real order based on the divine principles.

Mother recalls how one of her missions in life was to transform these Beings. She had to eliminate them but to kill, to destroy, is not the Divine Way. The Divine wants to change, to transform. So she worked upon these four Beings, Asuras, in her life. The Being of Consciousness, who had become Nescience agreed to be transformed. And when he was transformed, he said that he would work for the Divine. He then gave a date of his starting a revolution in China so many years thence. Mother noted the date and the Sun-Yat-Sen revolution started precisely at that time. It was a totally new turn in the history of China and the

world. The Asura of Suffering, original of Delight refused to change but he chose to be dissolved in the Divine, yes in the Original Divine Being. Then two are left, the Asura of Falsehood who calls himself the Lord of Nations. She has inflicted heavy blows on him but he is still alive. And the Lord of Death is still at large. His reign will end only when the supramental manifestation will be established on earth.

All this is not very relevant to our study of the Gita but I thought you would be interested in knowing that the tradition of the Asuras is there everywhere, in all religions of the world. Each one of us has some part which responds to the divine and some part to the antidivine. It is part of sadhana to promote, cultivate and encourage Godward tendencies and severely suppress and reject the undivine forces. That can be done only by pursuing this culture of transcending Tamas and Rajas, acquiring the rule of Sattva and once Sattva is stabilised, there is something in sattvic nature which by itself prods you to transcend it and move into the spiritual realm. There you surrender to the Divine, surrender to the Supreme who alone can consummate this movement towards spiritualisation and later, divinisation.

The rest of the Gita is devoted to this exposition of the doctrine of surrender because ultimately even after sattvic development, even after elimination of sattvic ego, there is a stage when the human soul, the human personality has to surrender to the Divine Lord and give up its pretence of achieving, of effecting, of performing. It is in the 18th Chapter that this movement of surrender is expounded in detail and reaches its culmination where you are asked to abandon all Dharmas and place yourself in the hands of the Supreme. To that we will come later.

43. Faith — Gunas

We are now in the 17th Chapter of the Gita and so far Arjuna has been instructed in the various modes, the Gunas of Nature, which govern an average person's life-activity. He has also been told how the mode of inertia, Tamas, has to be surpassed by cultivating the mode of kinesis, Rajas and both to be overcome by cultivating the mode of equilibrium which is Sattva. And that is not the end of things. The seeker has to go further after acquiring this mode of balance, harmony and that is to go beyond the operations of the three Gunas. Before that, while in the stage of the rule of Sattva, he respects the institution of Shastra, scripture which represents the cream of wisdom of the leaders of the society, experience and intuitions received for the individual and the collective guidance. That is the Shastra. To follow implicitly the scripture is characteristic of the sattvic individual.

Arjuna proceeds to ask a very intriguing question at this stage. He says, supposing a person does not consult or obey the instructions of a Shastra, does not care for the gradations of the Gunas but does what he wants to do irrespective of what the social conventions prescribe, what the Shastra calls for, does what he feels impelled to do, where does he stand? What is the mode, what is the Guna that governs him?

The reply is, such a person is governed by an inner faith. Faith, *shraddhā* of the Gita, is different from what

passes for faith in common parlance. It is not a conventional belief, not a religious conviction, not a conclusion arrived at by reasoning but something deeper. It is a direct perception by the individual of a truth and his perception is so evident, so clear that he pursues to render it in his life with the utmost zeal, dynamism. He will not take a no because he is convinced that that is the truth of his life. And to justify his life, he has to work according to the truth of his perception. Now this acceptance of a truth of perception, a compulsive turn of nature to carry it out in practice in life, unaffected by any doubts, contradictions of logic, — this is faith. And this faith, the Gita points out, comes from the inner Purusha, the Being, the Soul which is embodied in oneself. It is from that base that this perception issues.

It is unaffected by contradictions at any level of the being. You would remember Sri Aurobindo's definition of faith. Faith, he says, is a glimpse of a truth in the soul which is reflected in the mind or the heart. But it is perceived and glimpsed in the soul. It is not of mental origin. Its origins are deeper. That is why it has a ring of authenticity about it. It will not be denied. And this faith, coming as it does from a deeper source of being, reflects the will of the soul, the will of the Purusha. And when that is the will, that is the central faith, one does not care for what the Shastra says or the convention says or the populace says.

The faith is Man himself. Whatever your faith, that is you. Certainly it is that. What governs your life is your faith, the faith that this is the truth of your life. This faith gives the strength and the power to render it in terms of life. This concept of faith being the bed-rock of one's

personality, of one's life's mission is a central truth of spiritual experience and guidance.

Speaking further, Lord Krishna points out that in life, whatever the field, there are three elements. They are activity, sacrifice and self-giving. In Sanskrit they are Tapas, Yajna and Dana. These are the three ingredients of life-movement and these three are each of three types. He illustrates how the Gunas, the three Gunas, the modalities, influence one's life at every stage. He refers to food, for instance. Even of such a small matter of food, there are three categories. There is a food which is tamasic food. It is cold, heavy, rotten or half-rotten; that always increases the element of inertia, clouds the intelligence. Possibly even the preserved foods today which are so popular in the West, come under the category of tamasic food because most of the nutritive value goes in the technique of sucking out the liquid portion and in adding chemicals for preservation. A good deal of harmful stuff is added with the result that in America they were intrigued by the phenomenon of increase of cancer, stomach cancer, rectal cancer; they researched into the phenomenon, collected statistics and found that most of these cancers are caused by the growing use of preserved meat, beef, chicken, whatever. This has led, among other things, to the rise of the movement for natural foods. If you go round in some places, particularly in California, you will find everywhere lot of stress being given to nature foods, which are not preserved, which come direct from the farms. Even on the highways you can find stalls where vegetable stuff, eggs, come straight from the farms. People stop their cars and purchase them. In the shops they wait till these shipments arrive. This has also spread to some countries in Europe.

But in India we are taking special steps to produce preserved stuff. There are food specialities, where they are trying to preserve and sell in tins, a very retrograde step.

Then there is the rajasic food which some people like 'in the manner born', that is hot stuff, full of fire, giving excess of energy, pungent, acrid, even bitter. This is the kind of rajasic food which increases the element of passions, anger, desire and other traits. Then comes the sattvic food which is not too hot, not too cold, not too pungent, not too bland but which has a balance about it, which is pleasing to the eye. Rajasic food is never pleasing to the eye except to those who are greedy. But normally a sattvic food is pleasing and it has a wholesome effect on the body. One cannot get greedy for sattvic food, but yes for tamasic and the rajasic food. So the Gita gives us sufficient indications on the science of nutrition; this knowledge of the three modes influencing our food, should guide us in making the right choice.

Then he speaks of sacrifice. Sacrifice is also of three types. The sacrifice that is done because it has to be done without reference to the truth of it, the right way of doing it, is tamasic. In all these religious and spiritual matters there is a mode, a process to be observed. The tamasic sacrifice is done to the lower elementals, not to the gods, not to the Supreme but to smaller powers that satisfy petty desires and greeds.

The rajasic sacrifice is done usually to the lesser gods for satisfaction of one's desires, passions, ambition and there is a lot of ostentation about it. One does the sacrifice for effect, image-building, to impress people, to gain popularity. The sattvic sacrifice is one which is done according to the scripture, according to the law, using the right stuff

in the right quantities, with the right attitude of offering oneself; the material offerings are symbolic of the inner offering. A rajasic sacrifice is loaded with the desire for fruits, *phala*, but not the sattvic sacrifice. It is a flow, a flow of the soul to God. No show, no ostentation but the right time, the right season with the right participants. These are the three types of sacrifice.

Arjuna asks, well, some of these sacrifices are directed to the gods, lesser gods. Not all can do it to the Supreme God. How about them? The Lord assures that the Supreme Godhead receives what you offer in the right spirit even though you offer to the lesser gods. What matters is your approach, your spirit, your attitude. Even if it is offered to the smaller gods, the Supreme Godhead takes cognizance of it.

Then comes tapasya. This also is of three kinds. There is an austerity, a tapas which is done under mistaken belief, with wrong faith; you punish the body, you starve the body, you do not allow the body to sleep, you inflict torture on the body under the plea that you are going to purify the body, control the senses and desiccate the flesh so that the soul may come forward. This kind of wrongly inspired austerity, discipline, is the lowest kind and a false one. Lord Krishna makes a memorable statement that those who indulge in such austerities inflict wound on ME who am seated in each body. It is an insult, it is a hurt; they hurt ME, they insult ME, *avajānanti mūdhāh*, who AM in the heart of every creature. This is the lowest kind of tapas. The rajasic tapas is imposing, well advertised, meant for obtaining high rewards. This is mostly done by the asuric inspiration where they go to extraordinary lengths, ultimately for acquiring a very unspiritual hold on things, on

men and matters. The sattvic tapas is well-balanced, respecting all the members of the being, consistent with the welfare of the generality. It is a step leading to what is properly the askesis, concentration of energies. It is done at any level without inflicting harm, without indulging in vital drama but seeking enlightenment, focussing and release of constructive energies.

And then comes self-giving, *dāna*; any upward effort, any such movement should involve giving up of oneself, giving of what one has and is. Mostly in the general society, the giving is confined to material objects. Nobody does psychological self-giving. This material giving is of the tamasic type when it is done out of season. Then the question of *pātra*, whether the participants are deserving. With what motive does one give, to impress, to put the other person into obligation or as a return of what he has done? This is a calculated giving which is the worst. One does not care whether the recipient wants it or not. All one wants is to put the other person under obligation. Now this kind of irrational, out of season, improper giving, is tamasic.

The second one is, as in the other categories, imposing, to make an impression, to establish one's rule over others, giving with a motive of feeling philanthropic, feeling great and patronising. The third one is giving with the consciousness that you are giving to God, serving God in humanity. And you have a regret that you could not do more. And when you give, you do not give with any sense of claim. You have no claim for recognition or reciprocation by the other party. And as we say in the Indian tradition, the left hand does not know what the right hand does. Once you give, you forget about it, you do not make a note of it.

I am reminded in this connection how once there was somebody who had contributed considerable sum of money to the Ashram and he made no secret of it. He would always tell people he had given so much. Referring to such cases, Mother once observed that for those who remember what they have given, the Divine does not need to remember. Those who do not remember, the Divine does remember. Now this is a spiritual wisdom that the value of what you give and what you do disappears once you use it for your egoistic self-affirmation. You give out of a spontaneous, generous impulse, because you want to give, you do not expect a return. This is the sattvic *dāna*, approaching the spiritual concept of whole-hearted self-giving.

44. Operation of the Gunas

As we come to the last Chapter of the Gita, the Gita gives more instructions; so far it has emphasised on faith, a man is what he is by virtue of his faith. What is emphasised is a firm faith in a truth, in a perception and a readiness to live according to that faith. But that is not all. There are certain psychological conditions that are to be taken into account because ultimately man is a mental being and it is through his mind, his mental will-power that he acts. And before it proceeds to list the psychological factors, Arjuna asks a question: what exactly is the difference between Sannyasa and Tyaga? Normally the common mind confuses the two to be the same.

Lord Krishna makes a clear distinction between Sannyasa and Tyaga. Sannyasa is renunciation, renunciation of effort, of responsibilities, of objects, of possessions, of all that belongs to oneself. It is more or less a physical abandonment of things that one has and one owns. In the declining curve of the Indian civilisation, the gospel of renunciation of life took a powerful hold upon the mind of India, particularly as the philosophy of Mayavada had followed the gospel of Nirvana of Buddha, both contributing to devalue life, to depreciate existence in the world. As a corollary it was understood that one withdrew from involvement in life, in activity and crossed into some beyond or into some ineffable or infinite, leaving the world as something transitory, something not really existent. And this led to havoc.

Sri Aurobindo points out that this was a very unfortunate turn to the Indian life-spirit. At bottom it was a tamasic recoil, it was not an enlightened disengagement from life but a turning back on the problems, a tamasic withholding of exertion, refusal to face the problem of life. And it appealed to certain sections of the society to make it an excuse — the philosophy of illusionism, the philosophy of Nirvana — to make it a plank for refusal to participate in life-activity.

The Gita seeks to correct this twist of understanding at the very base. It is pointed out that the renunciation that is demanded is not external; it is not the casting off of the normal clothes, status, responsibilities and duties but it is an inner renunciation. Renunciation in the spiritual context is inner not outer. One can outwardly renounce anything and yet be attached, more attached to the little things and creature-comforts of life; attached also to the ego that is a product of this outer self-denial. It promotes the illusion of superiority that I have renounced everything, that I am superior to all these beings, ignorant ones. And impliedly, I am to be honoured, respected. So when a renunciate of the normal traditional type, comes before you even today, there is an implied claim for your acceptance of his superiority. He is offended if you do not respect his excellence.

In saying that the renunciation has to be inner, the Gita posits two definite truths. You have to renounce desire, desire for what? Desire for the fruit of action. Normally almost always you work, you enter into activity for some object, for some fruit of the activity and all your work is oriented towards that goal, the fruit of work. The Gita cuts the Gordian Knot in asking you to renounce

your claim to the fruits of works. Then what do you do? You offer it as your dedicated service to God. You do the work, you do not renounce the activity but you purify it, you use it as a cleansing agent, and offer it to the Divine, Master of the Being. It is not enough to renounce claim to the fruit of works. As things develop you realise that you have to renounce your claim for the particular activity itself. You learn to accept whatever comes as an assignment from God and not have attachment to any particular kind of work.

There is also renunciation of attachment to work. The sense of the doer has to go. As you fulfil these two steps, you realise that you are not really the doer, it is a power of Nature which works through you, through your instrumentation. And later on you realise that even that power of Nature works according to the Will of the Lord. So where are you then? You are just a petty instrument. So much for renunciation of desire.

And the linch-pin of ignorance, of slavery to Nature, is ego. The ego has to be renounced. We have discussed enough how dismissed in one form, one activity, ego takes a hundred other forms. And the last stage when the ego tries to hide from oneself is the spiritual ego. The ego has many avatars and one has to hound it out from its layers, a life-long discipline. Sincerity, scrutiny of oneself, all these are implied. It is not just an abandonment of works, giving up home, those who depend upon you, taking the ochre robes or whatever colour and walking out. That is only a tamasic or a rajasic recoil from life.

This inner discipline of weeding out desire and ego is Tyaga. Tyaga is spiritual, renunciation is more or less outer. This becomes more relevant in regard to the next

question that arises. Agreed that we eliminate desire, we dissociate ourselves from the ego. What next? There are those who say that actions, activity under whatever conditions is binding, contrary to the demands of spiritual life. If you have to work at all, you do what are called obligatory actions, such as are inescapable. As long as you live in society there are certain religious obligations like minimum rituals, ceremonies; they all have to be done, may be without desire, may be without ego, but they are to be done. The extremists point out that even then with whatever pure spirit you do these works, they can only be preparatory, they can only have a purifying influence. A stage must come when you completely abandon works, and take to the path of knowledge, Jnana.

The Gita does not accept this position. The Gita underlines the need to live one's life fully but in the spirit of God. You have to live, you have to fulfil your obligations, you have to play your part. Your personal likes and dislikes and preferences are irrelevant. What you are called upon to do by the Higher Will you have to do, necessarily in the right spirit, with the right dedication. And such actions cannot bind. Only activity that is done with desire and ego creates the chain of karma. Actions free from these impulsions cannot bind and particularly when they are offered as sacrifice to God, they have a positive contribution to make to the spiritual effort. All that is required is, in all ways and at all times, they have to be done but in a spirit of Tyaga, not Sanyasa which has got a very derogatory meaning because of our social degeneration. But Tyaga has still preserved its purity of conception.

The Gita then points out that whatever the type of activity, there are four or five factors. First is the *adhishthāna*,

the body with the mind and life activating it, that is the base. That is the foundation of your activity. Second is the *kartā*, the doer. You exert yourself. You just do not let things happen by themselves, you exercise your will, you are the *kartā*. Then there is the instrument *kārana*, instruments of action, the senses, the faculties. And fourth is the activities themselves which form part of the total action, *cheshtā*, movements which contribute to the totality of action. And the fifth is *daiva*, fate, fate signifying forces at work out side your reign. They can interfere, they can influence, they can overule. Now in all these, action, actor, instruments, the three Gunas butt in.

There is a detailed description of what is tamasic action, tamasic activity. Tamasic activity is that which is done mechanically. You do not think what you have to do, why you are doing it. It has to be done, it is being done; it has been done all these days, now also it will be done. This mechanical continuation of activity without any intelligent enquiry into it is narrow, you never get out of the little groove, in which you are acting. You do not like to be called out, to be disturbed, you do not open a window but confine yourself to the little corner which you have carved out for yourself and carry on that mechanical work. Slowness, lethargy, inertia and such elements are predominant in tamasic action.

Then there is a type of activity in which you do not reason; it is done to satisfy your desire, satisfy your ego, you do not care what happens to others in your course of action. You do not count how much energy you spend, you are reckless, you adventure. You go headlong in the satisfaction of your life-impulses. That is rajasic activity. The third is the sattvic activity where you know what you are

doing, why you are doing, you know how to do it best, you bring in all the elements involved in some coordinated harmony and try to produce the best results, always keeping a balance, not disturbing the whole set-up. At its highest, this sattvic activity transforms itself into a spontaneous action of harmony, tranquillity and happiness without regard to the results. The action is an end in itself.

It is legitimate to aspire for happiness, to work for happiness though happiness is not the end; as long as human affairs are what they are, happiness is an important feature of life. A tamasic happiness is one where you indulge in small petty pleasures, never caring to move out of your set pleasures, set activities, set habits, and as long as you do so you are happy, you do not want to be disturbed and you boast of it that you have no particular ambitions, you are satisfied with what you have. That is tamasic happiness. Rajasic happiness is where you may have even pain, hardship but you enjoy it because it leads you to the fulfilment of your desire. The physical and vital achievement of your objectives gives you strange pleasure. It may be on the battlefield where you are wounded; at that time you are not conscious of the pain that is inflicted on you, you have the zeal of a warrior. Sattvic happiness is that in which you are never disturbed. Whatever the ups and downs in life, you are always tranquil, you have equanimity. And this happiness turns, when you cross the sattvic belt, into joy, a joy which is not caused by any external factors but which is self-existent. That is a joy which is a mild form of spiritual bliss. That is the highest in this range.

Thus the Gita proceeds to point out the various categories of actions, the persons who act, the kinds of happiness which are distinguishable by the Guna that is pre-

ponderent in each situation. There are in these descriptions many situations where we recognise ourselves because today nobody is entirely a tamasic creature, a rajasic one or a sattvic one. We have moods. It is all inextricably bound up, so any particular Guna may be predominant. But basically these are the various categories which pursue man as long as he consents to be a creature of lower Nature, Prakriti. Once he decides to withdraw from the hold of the lower Nature and acquire a status in his impersonal Self and opens to the action of the universal impersonal power, the Para-Prakriti, there is a total change in the situation and the gates are opened for transcendence of the Gunas.

The Gita's ultimate call is to transcend the Gunas but you have to pass through the rule of Gunas, you cannot hope to turn your back on the Gunas and transcend them all at once: you have to pass through the yoke of the successive Gunas, the triple Gunas, experience them, work them out, correct the tamasic excesses by rajasic inductions, the rajasic excesses by sattvic injections and then acquire a spurt over the sattvic also.

45. Svabhava and Svadharma

In his writings on the Wisdom of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo speaks highly of the Gayatri Mantra, the prayer to the Sun God. There are indeed many Gayatries but the one that is celebrated over the land is one by Rishi Vishwamitra. It was only day before yesterday that one of our devotees, a very old one, came and told me: I feel like doing the Japa of Gayatri, I am inspired after seeing the television series on Rishi Vishwamitra. But I am told by a high authority that I should not do the mantra because I am not a brahmin. I advised him suitably. Atmost the next day the very same question came up whether a woman can do the Japa of Gayatri. She had been told that women have no authority, no right to repeat the mantra. I was reminded of these two incidents when I was reading for today's discussion, Sri Aurobindo's remarks on the almost universal misunderstanding of the four-fold classification of the society, how what the Gita has said on the subject has been misunderstood and almost perverted, because nowhere in any scripture of authority — the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Tantras, the Gita — has it been said that a woman cannot repeat the mantra or one who is not a brahmin cannot practise it. These are concoctions of a later degenerative age, of those who wanted to have a monopoly of authority.

Sri Aurobindo explains that when the Gita speaks of the four-fold order of society, it has in mind a classification based on one's temperament, one's innate nature and

the activity which comes naturally to one, *guna kama vibhāgashah*. It is something in-born; one comes to birth with a certain mould of nature. How is that mould of nature formed? Largely by the karmic consequences of the births that have gone before, the karma that has been chosen to be worked out in the present birth and this carries the sanction of the soul. It is not that we are compelled to work out the consequences of our actions in this or previous births without any choice in the matter. The choice is of the soul. It is the soul that decides what quantum of that karma is to be worked out in this present life and accordingly the temperament, the instrumentation of nature, are formed.

What about the parentage, you would ask? What about the social environment? Well, the effect of the hereditary influences, environmental surroundings, is very much on the surface. It is the most externals of the personality that are influenced by these factors. But the genuine impulsions come from what is called *svabhāva*. Svabhava is the mode of becoming. The soul chooses to become in a particular mode and accordingly one has the qualities. True, each one is heir to the working of the three qualities, the modes: Tamas, Rajas, Sattva, with variant preponderations but ultimately it is the in-born nature that works through the Gunas. It is not that the Gunas decide. The combination of the Gunas is made according to the choice of the soul for working out its purpose.

This is in line with Mother's perception that the Divine Will which is the supreme, which is the ultimate, does not work in an impersonal manner. It works through the individual wills. Your will and mine are the instruments for the effectuation of the Higher Will. To that extent we are

responsible. And this svabhava varies, naturally, from birth to birth. This in-born nature is not easy to spot. Normally we judge people by the station they occupy in the society. During the time of the Gita, avocations were decided according to one's svabhava or temperament. It is only in the later curve of decline that avocations came to be decided according to parentage. A brahmin's son became a brahmin, a kshatriya's son became a kshatriya and so on. But it was not so when the principle was applied in the right manner.

Sri Aurobindo notes that nowhere does the Gita speak of the four orders according to professional activities. It does not speak of the learning of a brahmin, the fighting qualities of a kshatriya, the commercial promise of a vaishya or the service potential of a shudra. It does not. He points out and underlines that the Gita speaks of the psychological equipment that decides who is who. It describes how a certain serenity of temperament, non-desire, equanimity, impersonality, light of wisdom, are the features of a brahmin. Chivalry, generosity, courage, forbearance, are the psychological qualities of a kshatriya and so on. So it is the psychological qualities that decide one's nature and according to that nature is one's law of being. Law of being is the dharma, svadharma. The svadharma of an artist, for instance, of a poet, is bound to be different from that of a kshatriya, or from that of the third category. These names, appellations have acquired a pejorative sense but originally they meant psychological classification and nothing else. According to one's innate nature is one's dharma.

Sri Aurobindo draws attention to the fact that there are temporary dharmas and a permanent dharma for each.

If I am placed by circumstances in a certain situation and I have to eke out a living, discharge my responsibility in a manner, in a position that has nothing to do with my innate svabhava, that is a temporary dharma. The permanent dharma is different, that with which I am born. Possibly not all are circumstanced to follow their innate dharma. In this artificial age where external compulsions preponderate over the inner, hardly a few are in a position to follow their svadharma. However, the Lord gives an assurance that whatever your avocation, whatever duties or activities you are obliged to perform, if you dedicate them to ME, if you do it in the right attitude, thereby you come to ME. That is even if you are not in a position to follow your own innate dharma but are compelled by circumstances to live in a different set-up, if you can do that in a spirit of offering and sacrifice, that works. That gives you the necessary salvation and reaches you to the Divine. These are some of the fundamental perceptions on the subject of Svabhava and Svadharma.

What about the permanent dharma? How does it come to be? When originally the manifesting Divinity releases so many sparks from its Being, each spark gradually develops into a soul. In each spark, in each issue there is a will, a will of the manifesting Divine to work out a certain truth. A particular ray of truth has to be expressed by the spark. That is what Sri Aurobindo calls the 'Real Idea', the Idea with which each of us is charged at the soul-level. Throughout the series of births at the soul-level, this Real Idea continues and that is the Divine Will in each one. It grades itself according to the development in each career accepting such part of the karma as is conducive to the growth of the soul.

Here we have the seeds of Sri Aurobindo's recognition of the double fact of Fate and Free Will. Fate, determinism, is at the highest level. The Divine will has chosen a particular destiny for me, another for you; that is the determinism. But how I am to work it out, how long it will take for me to fulfil that intention, that is left to me; that is the sense of freedom which is real, as real as the determinism on another plane. So, both are facts of life. Mother is very clear that the only determinism in life is the Highest Will of the Divine, the rest is all a mechanism for its working out. At times it may appear as circumstance, at times as necessity, at times as karma. Whatever it is, they are all the machinery through which the Central Will works. Even svabhava and svadharma are instrumental agencies for the working out of the Higher Will.

The element of freedom that is given to each soul is a practical fact. In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo describes how the soul can accept its fate, it can refuse. At its level it can do that. But if I am content to remain a creature, creature of circumstances driven by impulses, I cannot speak of free will, it is Nature that drives. So when there are controversies of svabhava and svadharma of castes, let us be clear that nowhere in the pristine Indian tradition are hereditary castes recognised. The present social stratification is a perversion, — happily on its way out — of certain high truths which have been turned into mechanical laws. That is responsible also for the degradation of large masses of humanity. Half the chunk of humanity have had to suffer for this wilful perversion of high principles. Thus far the Gita.

But Sri Aurobindo does not stop there. He recognises that there are in the collectivity four streams of consciousness: the stream of knowledge, intellect; that of strength, effectuation; that stream of production, organisation, har-

mony; that of service. And he describes in the *Synthesis* how corresponding to these four streams of Consciousness at the human level there are four down-coming lines of the Divine Consciousness, Divine Power, celebrated as the Divine Powers of Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalaxmi and Mahasarasvati. The new dimension that Sri Aurobindo gives is that while it is true that this four-fold classification obtains at a collective level, it is also true that in each individual all the four powers, all the four principles are embedded, though his preponderant nature may be in any one direction.

He speaks of the Vedic hymns in this regard, how from one bowl given by the Creator, the Ribhus, the Powers that build immortality, create four bowls. In each one of us all the four powers are there as potential. It will not do to develop only one, saying that this is my nature, this is my svabhava. It is a sign of advanced evolution, and it is the intention of the creative Spirit, that each one must develop all the four with whatever preponderance of any one or two, but all must be developed. Only then do you have an integral perfection. We have, each of us, a part that wants to know, to understand, that is what is called mental life. We have also a part that exudes strength, a push to effectuate oneself; also a part that wants to organise things, mystematise things, exchange, built relationships on a principle of harmony. And also in each from the simplest to the most complex person, there is the urge to work. Maybe I work for myself, or for the family, or for the society, or for God, whatever it is, there is an energy that is seething to express itself in work.

So, all these four principles are there embedded in each human individual. Integral perfection demands that

all the four are simultaneously developed. This is the distinctive feature of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's scheme of life developed here. There is the facility to develop the mind, facility to develop power, not to conquer others but to conquer oneself. And there is a freedom to organise one's life in the way that is natural to each one. Nobody questions, nobody interferes. And fourth, service to God, service to the Divine absorbing one's energies. Now all the four have been given facilities and encouragement to combine towards a fulfilment in the transmutation from the human to the Divine level. This is a unique feature, a fourfold synthesis of human personality. And that is where Sri Aurobindo goes beyond the enunciation of the principles of Svabhava and Svadharma in the Gita. This is a more comprehensive and more universal vision which enjoins a Svadharma of perfection — a many-sided perfection, — not a vertical advancement but a broad one where both the vertical and the horizontal are fused.

46. Towards the Supreme Secret

Before coming to the announcement of the Supreme Secret, Lord Krishna gives a kind of recapitulation of the main argument. First is the enigma of human action, how when one withholds one's active preoccupation with affairs of the world and attains to a certain inner passivity, there is a withdrawal, a disinterestedness in action. But the Gita's whole gospel is on active participation in the world. It explains how that is done. The Gita speaks of two Natures, the Lower Nature constituted of the three Gunas, modes, which hold most of us in their grip and the Higher Nature which is above the operations of the Gunas and which one discovers to be none other than the Power of God. There is also mention of two selves, one the mutable, the moving, the active Self, the Kshara, and the immutable, impersonal Self, the Akshara. One has to overcome the rule of the Lower Nature and the Kshara Purusha before one can attain to the status of the Higher Nature and the impersonal Self, the Akshara. The process, at any rate the central process, towards this end is of renunciation, a renunciation which is not the common Sanyasa but an inner renunciation of ego and desire, *tyāga*.

The Gita openly asserts the superiority of this inner withdrawal, inner renunciation to the external form. And after one attains to the impersonal Self, the Vedantic status, there ensues oneness with the Brahman consciousness which is above, not involved, impersonal. The Gita goes a

step further and points out that this is not the ultimate. *Brahma bhuya*, becoming Brahman, is not the ultimate. There is another step and that is to attain oneness with the transcendent Person, *madbhāva*, the Purushottama. So beyond the personal, beyond the impersonal, is the transcendent Purusha of whom both the selves are complementaries.

In attaining the status of the transcendent Purusha there is necessarily the loss of ego. Unless you delete the action of ego progressively, you cannot situate yourself in the impersonal Self. As long as the ego operates you cannot acquire the consciousness of the Impersonal. That calm, that silence, that peace is above the action of ego. And to discriminate, to reduce the power, the influence of ego, to separate the ego-self from our true Self is the Yoga of Buddhi.

Buddhi is intelligence, understanding will, not just a will but an understanding will. When you operate this will, Buddhi, there is first the element of discrimination between the true and the false, between the ego-self and the true self. And once you discriminate, you exert your will to disown the legacy of the ego. There are many who understand what is what, what is right and what is not right, but lack the will-power to put themselves on the side of the right. Under some plea or the other they shirk the choice. But in the Yoga of Buddhi the choice is clear. The will-power operates not only in the mind but in the emotions, in the vital region and even to a certain extent in the physical.

The Gita repeats again and again that by the practice of the Yoga of Buddhi you attain to the Purushottama who is beyond the Impersonal. Attainment of this status of

Transcendent is not the fruit of knowledge. Knowledge helps to a certain extent, takes you to a height but thereafter to raise your consciousness to that of the Supreme Purusha, Purushottama, devotion is indispensable. Unless there is a spontaneous flow of the being towards the Master of Being, unless there is a kind of ebullition of surrender to the Divine, no amount of knowledge is productive. Knowledge can give you a map but to traverse the distance it is only with the leap of the heart that you can do it.

So the Gita lays an emphasis at this stage on the necessity of Bhakti and it asserts that Bhakti completes Jnana. Devotion, love, is the culmination of knowledge because the highest knowledge reveals to you that the Supreme Lord and your own self are not two different entities, your self is only a portion of the Supreme Person. A link is established for the interchange first at the level of emotions, and as the purification proceeds at the level of the psychic, the inner soul, and this leads to a fruitful union, not a dry annulment of yourself but a living union between the human and the Divine.

We have spoken of knowledge, we have spoken of devotion, but note that action continues. In the Vedantic solution activity is put far behind as not relevant, not pertinent to the new status. But the Gita is emphatic that action continues to be done though with a different motivation. The first step is to do the work as a sacrifice, not for the satisfaction of ego or desire but as an occasion for consecration. That is the first stage. The second stage is when you realise that you are not really the doer, but it is Nature, Prakriti that does the work through the operation of its modes. The third step is when you realise that this active Nature, Prakriti, itself is only a frontal aspect of a

Higher Prakriti which is above the operation of the Gunas. That is the Para Prakriti, the Higher Nature, which you realise to be nothing else than a Power of God. This Nature is not something different from the Lord of whom it is a Power.

There is a good deal of controversy about the Jiva, the evolving soul, when it unites with the Lord: does it disappear or does it continue? There are schools of philosophy, some schools of Yoga which say that once you unite, you merge. The drop is absorbed in the ocean. There cannot be an individuality for a drop of water which joins the sea. But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are emphatic that the Jiva, being an eternal portion of God, cannot eliminate itself. It continues its individual status even when it merges into the Lord, the Lord of all, as a centre, a particular centre which had been emanated for a particular purpose. Mother asserts more than once that a soul-spark which had been emanated with a purpose can never be cancelled. It continues to be in whatever status. The Gita supports this position saying that what takes place in the union is not a negation but a fulfilment. The purpose for which the spark was issued, emanated, is fulfilled when after a long series of experiences, steps of evolution, the enriched soul unites with the Master of the Being. You cannot say it merges. If it is a merger at all, it does not affect the individual formation. It continues, maybe as a centre, maybe as an individual focus, in the oceanic Being of the Supreme.

How does he act, a person who has attained this or a person who is on the way to this fulfilment? What are the standards, what are the laws to which he subjects himself? The Gita points out that all our Dharmas, standards, laws, are ego-based. They are governed by the three Gunas.

Analyse any law with which the human society governs itself, you will see the operation of the three Gunas. Even when one speaks of the impersonal silence, very often it is a cloak for a tamasic lethargy. One may not want to exert oneself, so one seeks the impersonal silence. These standards are under the drive of the Gunas. The true law, the true standard is of the greatest Self and the greatest Spirit, not man-made. But on the way, the sattvic regulations, the laws which are the operation of the Sattva at its highest bring one to the threshold, as it were, of the Supreme Law.

Sri Aurobindo cites the example of the Mahayana Buddhism which requires the practitioner to renounce desire, give up attachment and yet to have a compassion for humanity, for the world, for all orders of creation, And action in the spirit of that compassion is the teaching of Mahayana. Sri Aurobindo cites the instance of the Chinese Tao which is eternal, what supports the whole Nature; it cannot be spoken of, cannot be described, but it is nevertheless the ultimate which, in a sense, is what the Upanishad describes as *asat*; you cannot define it; *asat* does not mean 'no existence', it means an existence beyond all formulations by the mind. It is the Supreme All which means Nothing. In practical terms it is 'nothing'.

Thus even the highest peaks reached by the sattvic mode in the Mahayana, in the Taoian philosophy, fall short because they give you the realisation of something that cannot be defined or described. But there is something still. That is the transcendent Reality to which the soul surrenders.

And the Gita sums up: first in the Self, *ātmani*, you realise and station yourself in your real Self, Atman; *ato mayi*, then in ME, you cannot lodge yourself in Him unless

you first recover your status in your own highest Self. The highest Self of each one is not the Ultimate. It is the highest as far as this formulation of the Universe is concerned. But of its own existence, there is the transcendent aspect. And when one attains unity with That as a result of utter surrender, upsurge of love, even when the ego dissolves, the spiritual individual, the Jiva remains, because it is an eternal portion of the Transcendent. The Transcendent cannot be abolished, what unites with the Transcendent cannot be abolished. This triple Status of the Reality, the mobile, the immobile and the transcendent and the necessity of the evolving soul to pass through these gradations step by step, is a feature of the affirmative philosophy of the Gita.

Is Gita the final word, you may ask? Let me at once say that at the level at which the human mind had arrived at that stage in the history of mankind, the gospel of the Gita was indeed the highest. But it is not so and it is not expected to be regarded as such, thousands of years thereafter — at least 3000 years — when the human consciousness has grown enormously. New vistas have opened and there is a natural enlargement of the vision, an expansion and integration of life-values. At this stage the Truth-mind or Truth-knowledge with the power of the Truth-mind becomes relevant. Sri Aurobindo supplies this dimension of the possibility and the certainty of the Truth-consciousness picking up all the past stages of evolution in itself and leading to a new order, a spontaneous order of the Truth and the Right.

But before one can arrive at that, an utter surrender to the Highest is necessary. As long as you keep vestiges of the past, the full truth cannot reveal itself. And that is the

Supreme Secret: a joyous surrender to the Lord of the Being, the Master of the Universe, the Supreme Reality. That is the note to which all the 18 Chapters of the Gita lead. You are called upon to give up all man-made standards and surrender to the Lord, that is to His Will; that is the highest Dharma.

The Gita opens with a confusion of standards. Arjuna is bewildered because there are so many standards claiming his allegiance and in the last chapter the human representative is called upon to give up all those standards and trust to the highest, the standard of the Divine Will. Ultimately that is what the Mother also says in a different language when she is asked: when we do not know what course of action to take, when we are confused, when there are conflicting claims, what do we do? She says, what leads you to God, that is your dharma, what is right. What retards, what holds you back, that is wrong. That is the simple barometer. How easy it looks, how difficult it is, is obvious to those who try to practise it, because everywhere there are veils of ignorance, veils of ego which confuse the mind.

47. Above All Standards

We are in the last lap of our study of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on The Gita*. He points out how before proceeding to give the final instruction, Sri Krishna sums up the whole teaching and in doing so draws attention to the mystery of the Supreme Person and the vast Impersonality.

In the scheme of the Gita we realise the Divine in the personal aspect, the Purushottama, the impersonal aspect as the Immutable Brahman and also in the individual aspect as the Immanent Divine, not only in the Universe but in each one in the seat of the heart. He is there, as Sri Aurobindo describes elsewhere, as the 'unworshipped guest'.

Then the Teacher asks Arjuna: you have seen so much, you have heard so much, what is the point in refusing to play your part? Your nature is going to compel you, you are not a free man, it is an error of the ego-self to think that you can do what you choose. There is your individual svabhava, nature, and then there is the universal nature acting on you and forcing you to work out the Divine's Will. It is no use asserting your self-will.

The spiritual perfection of the individual is only the first step. Then comes the spiritual universality, God in the Universe. One has to extend the consciousness to realise the Divine present in the Universe. And this Divine in the Universe is not only an immanent Presence, not only a supporting impersonality but also a transcendent personal

Consciousness. And the final word of the Gita comes to this: you have to realise God seated within, realise your identity with the Presence, both active and the passive in the Universe and then have an integral union with the Purushottama, the transcendent Person.

Then we come to the last two verses to which Sri Aurobindo gives so much importance, in fact the whole Indian tradition regards these two last verses as Mantras, potent words, words of deliverance. They have not only the power but they also contain in these pithy words the teaching of the Gita.

Manmanā bhava, become my-minded; to become my-minded you must have a certain purification of the mind, a clarity of understanding, a cultivation of spiritual intelligence. That is the Buddhi Yoga, the mind is soaked with the remembrance, the consciousness and Presence of the Lord. The Yoga of the Mind, of Knowledge is to be perfected. But that is not enough.

Your whole being is tuned to the Lord. You are committed joyfully, not as a discipline, not as a vow, but to a spontaneous, blissful junction at the level of the soul. It is from there the devotion starts, it does not start in the mind. Even if it appears to be a mental movement, it is a reflection of something that springs up in the heart. And that devotion develops into adoration. Adoration is to be awake to the presence of the Divine Beloved everywhere and thrilled to his special Presence wherever there is beauty, wherever there is harmony. Any intense expression of these powers, of love and beauty, bring forth a tear of joy, a spring of the soul. Everything reminds you of him, of the Divine; a child, a sunset, a beautiful tree, palm tree of which Mother was so fond, all recalls something else.

There are visible, living symbols of the Divine's Presence. And this adoration in which the whole being delivers itself in that movement of self-giving to the Lord, to the Divine, culminates in love. Love is a spontaneous movement of self-giving.

Thus in the Vedas and the Upanishads love has only this meaning, a joyous self-giving to God without expecting any kind of return, response. These are jarring notes when we speak of pure love, they pertain to certain lower gradations of human love. But this love for God is the culminating movement of devotion, so much so that in the culminating stage there is such a union that there is neither the lover nor the loved. Even that distinction is not there.

Mad yāji, sacrifice to Me. First the Yoga of Knowledge, the Yoga of Love, now the Yoga of Sacrifice Mother points out sacrifice is hardly the right rendering of the word yajna; sacrifice has a tinge of pain, there is something that causes pain in the very fact of giving. But in the Indian concept of yajna it is a spontaneous and a happy rendering, of whatever you think or are or do, to God.

The Gita delineates the various steps by which this concept of sacrifice is to be woven in the regular and daily life of the aspirant, whatever the work. You treat it as an occasion for consecration, you offer the work to God, remember and offer. Naturally once the movement of work starts you forget and tend to become the work. You have to constantly pull yourself back and re-dedicate yourself. Once you separate yourself from the sense of being the doer of the work, you lose your ego-sense of being the one who determines. You no longer feel the doer; you are an instrument and this sense of instrument culminates into

one of being a channel. In being an instrument, there is still a sense of personality but in being a channel there is none. You just allow yourself to be used as a means for flow of energy, flow of shakti. And that leads to identity with the Power that flows.

If this is too high a concept, Lord Krishna asks that you first offer the fruits of work to the Divine. When you offer the fruits to the Divine, you are not perturbed over what results ensue. You develop a sense of equality. And equality is a sure sign of the movement of liberation. So, abandonment of the fruits of work and next, abandonment of the choice of work. Who are you to determine that this shall be your work and not that? The one who decides in his wisdom knows and assigns to each one his role, his work. For a spiritual seeker it is meet that he accepts what work comes to his hands and does it with dedication. Mother would say: you cannot say that you want work which is interesting; the right attitude is to take interest in whatever work comes to you. That is a spiritual attitude, to take interest in the work that is given by the Divine or by one who represents the Divine to you. That removes the last shades of claim, of egoism, of desire.

So, *manmanā bhava, mad bhaktah, madyāji, mām namaskuru*, you bow down to Me. Bow down does not mean the physical act of prostration, it is a symbol. It is to completely subordinate yourself, surrender yourself to the Master of your being. Greet him everywhere, in every one. The Namaskara in the Indian tradition is Namaskara to the Lord, to the Divine Presence in each one. It is not something like a hand-shake. It is a *mudrā*, a designed posture of the limbs. All the fingers meet; all currents of life, mind, heart, join together and greet the Lord, the

Divine in the other. When you are so conscious, when you do this act of salutation with that consciousness, it is bound to have an effect on the other. It is not a casual means of greeting. That is why he says *mām namaskuru*, bow down to Me. When you do so, the Yoga of Mind, intellect, the Yoga of Devotion, of love, the Yoga of Work, the Yoga of surrender, lead you to Him, *mām eva eshyasi*, thou shalt come to ME. He does not say you will realise Me but you will come to ME.

This is the Truth, I tell you this Supreme Truth because you are dear to Me, *priyosi me*. The Avatar speaks to the Vibhuti, thou art dear to Me, that is why I tell you in truth, this is the Way.

And once that attitude is formed, that knowledge is absorbed, what follows next is what you must do. You give up all ruling standards of life and surrender to the Lord and the Lord alone, *mām ekam sharanam vraja*; ME means the Truth I stand for, the Truth that I embody Then will I deliver thee from all grief, all sin.

These are the final words of the epitomising utterance of Lord Krishna in the Gita.

With this we come to the conclusion of our study of the Gita as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo.

Q: There was one question and that is: Has Gita spoken the last word, the Ultimate Word? If it has, how does Sri Aurobindo come in, how does he become relevant?

A: Actually the Gita concerns itself with the individual, not so much with the collectivity. In one place, of course, it speaks of *loka sangraha* to keep the collectivity going. But the Yoga of Collectivity is difficult. Certainly all cannot surrender. Surrender can only be an individual exercise. So this aspect of collectivity is not there in the Gita, possi-

bly because the human mind was not ready for that dimension. Three thousand years afterwards, following the hints strewn in the Tantras of fusing the individual aims and goals with the collective, Sri Aurobindo takes up the thread and affirms that an individual cannot perfect himself unless he perfects the collectivity of which he is a part. So individual perfection is tied up with collective perfection. Collective perfection alone can say the last word for the individual. That is one of the specialities of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Vision, which is an advance on the thought of the Gita. But on that account the Gita is not obsolete. The Gita prepares for this dimension by calling upon the individual not to be too self-centred but to expand himself, throw out the bonds of ego and desire and realise the divinity in himself, in the Universe and above. The call to realise one's connection with the Divine in these different dimensions, is a door that the Gita opens to the larger vision of Sri Aurobindo where the collective dimension is as important as the individual. And it is as decisive. The individual realisation may be a key, may be a first capital step but the culmination is the collectivity.